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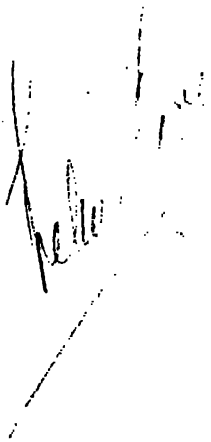

An Eventful Night

An Eventful Night

A Comedy of a Western Mining Town

By

Clara Parker

Doubleday & McClure Co.
New York 1900

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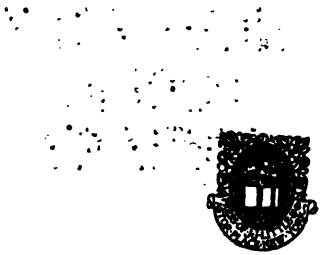

An Eventful Night

HOOPER FROM C. O. AUG 1926

An Eventful Night

I am not going to lead up to my story gracefully, for when you have learned that my name is George Manning and that I was, at the time the thing happened, visiting my married sister in one of the liveliest, roughest, and most altogether corrupt mining towns to which a lady of culture was ever carried by an adoring husband, you know all that it is needful you should know of me, prior to my little burst of notoriety.

My sister was very proud of me—whether justly or unjustly I am not prepared to say—and immediately on my arrival began flooding her house with all the single ladies for miles around, in the hope, I was well aware, that some one of the undeniably fine creatures would tempt me to desert my business in the East and set up for a

family man on some of the ranches or in some of the mines which in the form of dowries hung about the persons of these already alluring young things.

I had no intention of following out her secret desires, but I had not the slightest objection to making myself as agreeable as nature would permit; and all went smoothly until one day I awoke to the fact that a severe pain was racking at my lower jaw, which, finding itself unable to contain this pain within ordinary limits, had swelled itself up to a degree shocking to behold. As kind-hearted a woman as ever lived, my sister was perfectly brutal in her comments on my appearance, and made it so plain that she expected me to keep out of sight of the numerous callers with which her house was always thronged, that I skulked about all that day like a forlorn leper, a large bandage about my head and a very displeasing ointment imparting a pungent odour to my entire person.

Night came, and I was no better. My sister became desperate. There was noth-

ing for it—I must be lanced. The pain had stopped by this time, and I pleaded delay, but was scornfully refused. I hinted at rebellion, and then my fears were meanly played upon. Who could tell but that my disorder might be some deep-seated affection of the bone? I laughed softly at this, but was promptly frowned down. Dr. A—— must be seen. He knew everything.

"Well, send for him, then!"

But no—he must not be sent for; he was in delicate health; I must go to him.

What! In this high wind. I was in delicate health myself!

Nonsense. There was nothing the matter with me.

Then why go for a doctor?

I will not write down all my pitiful efforts at logic with a woman, and that woman a sister. I went, of course—an unsightly mass of shawls in a close carriage; and after a long drive, during which I went to sleep, I was admitted into the presence of the most disagreeable man I

ever met—none other than the great doctor himself, who was eating what smelled like very poor soup out of a large bowl, and who insulted me the moment I explained my business. I was pitifully servile, but to no purpose. I abused myself in bitter terms; I jeered at my own folly in supposing my case worthy of his notice: but I could not soften his judgment by a hair's breadth. I meanly laid my indignity at my sister's door, and told him as mirthfully as possible that she had feared some trouble with the bone. For answer he drove a lancet in my swollen jaw to its very hilt, and stopped my speech with my own blood.

I could have shrieked aloud, but for the contempt in his eye; and then he called my trouble a "gum-boil," as the most atrocious thing he could lay his tongue to; and while the cold sweat of pain was drying on me, I handed him a large bill, from which I got no change.

I should have been gone in a moment, and what did happen never would have

happened, but my bandages kept me. While I stood in the cold hall fumbling with them, another patient, or at least another caller, entered. Not a meek, dejected figure this time, with his head tied up in shawls, but a great, aggressive creature in a huge coat, with a heavy, stamping step, and a smell of new leather about him, which probably came from his long-wristed driving gloves. He paid no attention to me—indeed, he could scarcely have seen me, I stood so far back in the shade—but strode on into the presence of the doctor, leaving the door open and having a general air of hurry and impatience.

It is all going down just as it happened, so I may as well confess that I was conscious of a sudden vulgar curiosity as to the reception of my successor.

"Dr. A——, I believe!" exclaimed the newcomer in the loud, aggressive tone affected by the hack-driver and travelling showman, and then stopped—which was more than the doctor did, for he kept on with his soup, rattling the spoon against

his false teeth at each mouthful with a vindictive, stabbing movement. "Well," he snarled at length, setting down the empty bowl and fixing the man with a savage scowl, "what's the matter with you? Have you got a gum-boil, too?" This last with contempt unutterable. This was too much! Of course the newcomer knew nothing of me and my trouble, so was ignorant of the creature's meaning; but remembering the pain of that boil, if I must so call it, I felt that it should have received more respectful treatment, and I was on the verge of doing something rash, when the doctor again surprised me.

"Shut that door!" he screamed, but whether at me or my successor, I could not tell. Evidently the man thought that he was addressed, for muttering an exclamation not strictly moral, he closed the door with a bang that made me wink.

I came to myself at that, and a little ashamed of lurking there, I finished my bundling hastily, and withdrew with stateliness. My carriage was waiting for me

just where I had left it, which should have surprised me, considering that I had told the man not to wait, as I felt inclined for some exercise after my day's retirement. This, however, I failed to remember, only observing, as I climbed inside, that there was no one in the driver's seat. Doubtless he was a tippling animal, and had stepped across the way to that cosy little saloon I saw there. Another time I would not have grudged him his little fling, but I was growing decidedly ill-tempered, and meanly plotted how I should disconcert him on his return.

It was a gratifying thought as I huddled myself upon the seat to wait his coming. I had been so ignominiously handled myself, that the consciousness of the power I held over my sister's hireling elevated me almost to where I had stood in my own mind before the occurrence of this affair of the boil! Petty? Of course it was; naked human nature is a horrid thing to look at under the scourge of bodily afflictions.

I had been sitting for some moments and

was just getting warm and comfortable under the robes, when I heard the coachman mount hurriedly to his seat. I began gathering myself to give him a surprise, when the carriage-door was flung open by a rude hand, and a tall, muffled figure bounded in like some captured animal forced behind the bars by a keeper's lash.

In my surprise I sat passive, so might or might not have been observed. Anyway, I got no greeting; and my informal friend was just settling himself into the seat opposite, when, muttering in a voice muffled by many wrappings, "I've forgotten the other case," he bounded to his feet, and reopening the door, framed his lips for a peevish call to the driver. At least, to be perfectly exact, that is what I think this intruder designed doing; but owing to circumstances I shall never know to an exact certainty, for at that moment there came a loud, impatient crack of the whip, the horses bounded forward into the night, while I—well, I was dazed and bewildered, my jaw was still

racked with the pain of the late operation, an uncomfortable sensation of coagulated blood lay about my teeth, and when you add to this my injured self-love as well as my annoyance at the glaring insubordination of the driver, it would seem to me there was sufficient excuse for what followed. It is true, and I have never denied it, that the check-strap was at that moment within easy reach of my hand; and bloodless critics now claim that reason demanded I should pull it, stop the carriage, denounce the coachman, confront the intruder, and otherwise air the various items of the mystery in which I thought myself involved; but I scorn their logic.

As I have before explained, the city in which my sister lived was in the fermenting state of growth. It was gorged with picked-up gold, and red-handed with strife as to who should own it. I am a full-blooded person myself, and the suspicion that I was being made the victim of some rascality acted on me like a pleasing intoxicant. All seemed then explained; the

temporary absence of the coachman from his box, the insolent freedom of the intruder—all pointed as clear as noonday down the road to dark suspicion. Acting on my first impulse, I sprang like a wounded hyæna across the carriage, and had my companion by the throat, nor did I relax my grip upon the scrawny thing until the sudden flash of a street light revealed to me in the horror-stricken face peering at me above my rigid knuckles the ill-favoured features of Dr. A——, now twined about and darkly framed by a huge muffler, scarcely less in dimensions than the one twisted about my swollen jaw.

It was like a sudden thunder-clap, and though, when you considered the man's disposition and his standing in society, my throttling him like a common thief was an act for which there would be no pardon granted, yet it was my plain duty to let go and apologize. I did let go, but with what sickening results I hardly have the courage to record.

Remember, please, that the carriage-door was still open, that Dr. A—— was already half-way out, and that the horses were going at full speed. A sudden jerk was all that was needed—and the jerk came. For one instant the unfortunate man toppled where he stood, while his eyes glared into mine with rage and fear, and his lean throat struggled hoarsely with a sound; and with a little, involuntary shriek, I saw him make a dreadful plunge, stand fairly upright on his head and shoulders, and collapse in a mashed, sickening fashion into the shallow gutter.

Now, indeed, the carriage should have been stopped, and no further trifling about it; but a strange stupidity crept over me as I stood craning my head back to the spot we were fast leaving in our wake, until a second flash of light revealed a fact to me which brought me down upon the carriage seat, very mild and limp, my mind filled with serious speculations about the awkwardness of the scrape I had got myself into.

I was not in my sister's carriage—and more, there now floated before me the distinct remembrance of having dismissed the coachman at the doctor's door. "Yes," ran on my mind in morbid detail, "I had dismissed my driver, had sought out the great man with my sordid complaint, had lingered in his passage-way, had hidden in his carriage, had flown at him like an avenging tiger-cat, and now he lay a dead man by the roadside, with heaven knows how many witnesses to our death-struggle, in full tilt to set the legal bloodhounds on my trail. And there was my coachman still at large with his tale to tell, and there was the possibility of last words which my victim might falter forth upon some official breast, stamping me as his assailant." That the man was dead seemed my only hope, and I sat and nursed my horrid thought until my mind was a charnel-house of ghastly speculation. How far removed I seemed from the peaceful sorrows of yesterday, and how I cursed my stupid forgetfulness about the carriage and

my unseemly haste to throttle an innocent man on whose privacy I had intruded!

In the meantime the carriage sped on, on, and on, faster and yet faster, and still I sat there dull and lumpish, trying to form my vapid plans as to what I should do when it should stop. Then I think that the real folly of my actions began, for it occurred to me that, after all, there would not be so much to startle the driver. Dr. A—— and I were much the same height; we both happened to be much bundled about the head; what was there to prevent my alighting without suspicion, and then watch my chance to cut and run, leaving the charge of sudden madness to rest on the memory of Dr. A——, when his corpse should be discovered by the roadside? That I battled with these thoughts I well remember, but their fascination grew upon me, and I kept returning to them at intervals until my whole line of action, despite the efforts of my reason, was clearly mapped out before me.

Gradually, too, the whole thing grew

upon me as funny and theatrical, and even the certainty which possessed me that the dead body of that unpleasant doctor still lay by the roadside could not hinder me from a certain awful relish in it. In vain did I force myself to dwell on the shocking figure he must cut; but all that guilt and shame could do for me, in the state of mind I then endured, was to force from me a general forgiveness of his offensive treatment of me. That done, my moral sense would budge no further.

And now another disquiet laid hold upon me. It was becoming painfully evident that we must have long since passed beyond the limits of the city. No lights now flashed in at the carriage windows; no opposing roll of wheels deadened the sound of our vehicle as it rattled over the frozen ground, and as my mind glanced about 'midst the tales of rural bloodshedding I had heard, of masked men rising like conjurers' puppets before the belated traveller, of ill-gotten gains that had been made to vanish like a vision, I began con-

structing headlines for the next day's issue in which the name of George Manning was conspicuous.

There was no getting out unless I chose the certain death of a broken neck to the more shadowy horrors with which I was threatened. Suddenly, it seemed, we began going sheer up. Five, ten, fifteen minutes, and still we climbed, until my faculties became absorbed in the mere act of holding on. A whiteness, as of the snow which I knew still lingered among the mountains, threw a glare into the pitchy darkness of the night. The horses slipped, the driver swore, and I hung on, while the wind struck mournful chords on the branches of the lonely pines. "The man is mad," I gasped, as I dug my nails into things about me. "Is mad, is mad," moaned the rising wind; but who was mad it did not tell. Perhaps I, perhaps the driver. Heavens, what a lurch! And now the carriage has stopped, and with it my heart had stopped also. My nerves, played on by the mournful wind and the

pitchy night, are tingling like a child's; but there is no escape! A glare of light bursts in through the carriage door, and I find myself groping for the medicine chest left upon the seat by Dr. A——.

Things could not have turned out worse for me. I had made certain in my own mind that the carriage would stop at some entrance remote from the house, and that, while the driver's interest was centred on his horses, there would be ample time for me to take wing. Imagine, then, my panic when, directly following the burst of light, a voice, not that of the driver—with which I had grown familiar as he cursed his beasts up the mountain side—but smoother, one trained into a social key, exclaimed eagerly, "So you are here at last, doctor! We have been looking for you impatiently. She seems to be growing worse rather than better."

"She!" I could have sunk to the earth. My patient then was a woman. I had not thought of this possibility. My soul was piteous with guilt. The plight

of the expectant patient had never before entered my head. Suppose some victim of acute neuralgia, some delicate female, was waiting in hysterical misery for a friendly dose of morphine; or some case of chronic heart failure lay, cold and livid, in dire need of one of the mystic drugs contained in the medicine chest I grasped so limply!

Well, I was desperate, there was no help for me. Heaven send the woman might be old and ugly, with no malady in reach of earthly help! In despair I climbed from the carriage, to find myself standing in a glare of light before a long, rough building perched like an eagle's nest upon the barren, desolate spot, while behind me lay the blackness, the gulf-like abyss from which we had crawled.

A dark, handsome man of some forty or fifty was peering eagerly into my face, and the necessity for self-control suddenly presented itself to me with startling force. In my youth I had been much given to parlor theatricals, and through all the con-

fusion of that moment those early days of training came back to me like the whispering of angel voices. The voice of the accepted stage doctor in my day had been bluff, though pleasant—my voice should be bluff, though pleasant.

"A rough ride," I said, huddling my coat about me as in fancy I moved up and down before the footlights with an easy stage stride. "We have been the deuce of a time getting here."

"I hope you are not suffering from the cold," exclaimed my companion politely, as he moved up the steps of the building before me. "You seem heavily bundled."

"I got mixed up with a fool of a dentist," I retorted, and then I swore discreetly. It would not do to be too nice in my language. Able old men rarely are.

My companion murmured polite sympathy over the distress, and laughed in gentle appreciation of my rugged displeasure. "Our teeth are sad burdens all through life," he said, as he conducted me into a large, well-warmed, but badly

lighted apartment. "We weep, and we swell, and we go rickety and altogether wrong until we get them, but no sooner are they through than they commence again to play the very deuce and all with us."

Although attending me with courtesy, I could see that he was filled with a restless impatience which could hardly brook the necessary removing of my coat and rearrangement of my bandages, which, you may be sure, I took good care not to remove from my face, and which, swelled as I was about my only visible eye, must have effectually disguised me from my own mother.

"When you are quite warm we will go upstairs," he said grudgingly, as I stretched my stiff hands towards the fire; but I would not take the hint to hurry, for had the scaffold and halter been before me, I could not have felt much greater reluctance to go forth and meet them.

My surroundings were, as I expected, decidedly suspicious. Though the items which made up my evidence were innocent

enough individually, yet, looked at collectively, they could not but appear peculiar, seen in that country, at that hour of night, and at that distance from anything like civilized restrictions. In the first place, the entire incongruity of the man himself with his surroundings was something that demanded explanation ; for here in a place which would naturally suggest to your mind a host either of the strictest hermit type, shaggy of hair and eloquent of a gloomy past, or a toil-stained miner wedded to his pipe and glass, I found a man of town speech, one lately from the hands of a thoughtful tailor, and bringing with him into that wilderness all the troublesome necessities of civilized life; for example, the soft rug flung down before the glowing grate, the books and papers tossed everywhere about, and, above all, the snowy whiteness of exquisite table linen showing upon some shabby old mahogany in the room beyond.

All these marked the gentleman of taste. Then why the comparative barbarity of his

retirement, why the unusual ornamentation of pistols upon his mantel shelf, why his haste and embarrassment, and why the man-eating look of his great bloodhound, that kept privately testing the sharpness of his yellow fangs on the legs of my trousers?

You may suppose that I did not remain suspiciously silent nor show myself offensively curious as I noted all these little facts. No. Again my private theatricals came to my aid. In the days gone by I had been so accustomed to carrying on long monologues within three feet of the stage villain, and keeping accurate watch of the cue at which he was to lay me unconscious at his feet, while, to the audience, I appeared perfectly blind to his existence, that at that trying time I was enabled to make all my observations and silently kick the ugly brute which had marked me as suspicious, without drawing down upon my head anything like a doubtful scrutiny from the black, restless eyes of my mysterious entertainer.

He gave me his name as "Brown," which was so glaringly commonplace that I privately rejected it, and could only be thankful that, in his preoccupation, he paid no heed to mine. I seemed to be a medical man to him, and nothing else. When I could make no further excuse for delay we went out through a windy passage, and began mounting some stairs; scandalous stairs they were, too, crooked and steep, and so badly lighted I came near raking down my companion in a general crash before I grew accustomed to the semi-darkness. He bore with me patiently, however. "We are dreadfully primitive here," he said lightly; "but as yet electricity has only climbed the mountain in its natural state."

As he spoke we reached an upper hall where everything was in total darkness, and when I paused, half-expecting the cold muzzle of a revolver to be clapped against my head, he took me gently by the arm, and led me like a shambling dotard down its winding length, nor

seemed to notice how I dragged my feet cautiously along the carpeted way and dug in my heels at each fresh turn, so full was I of remembered tales of yawning pits into which victims, such as I, were made to fall. Some of these pits had been lined with naked blades, and I seemed to feel their sharp edges spearing at my joints. It was with a gasp of relief I paused with my guide at the extreme end of the passage, where, after a clicking sound which I could have sworn was the turn of a key in the lock, he swung a door open before me, and I was gently pushed into the apartment of my patient.

While I was down-stairs in the presence of my dark-browed companion and his evil-looking animal, with the combative thrill of suspected danger tingling through my veins, I wouldn't have imagined that I could ever feel the skulking criminal I did when I at length realized that I was actually standing in the apartment of some suffering woman, in no licensed character, with no power to alleviate her sufferings,

merely there as a frivolous adventurer, though, it may be conceded, an unfortunate one. Any male relative would have been justified, could I have been unmasked, in then and there pitching me bodily from the window. Indeed, at that moment, I think I should have blessed the avenging foot which should have removed me from the scene of my confusion; and yet had any one searched my heart as I dragged my heels heavily behind me across the threshold, he would have found it so filled with shame and contrition, so abounding in respectful compassion, that, had he been a human being, he would have been more inclined to take me by the hand and lead me forth like a pitying elder brother.

A small white bed stood in one corner, draped about with some pinkish stuff, just what I could not tell, for I had not the temerity to more than glance in that direction, and when a tall, portly woman rose slowly from one of the dark corners and confronted me, I should certainly have sunk

grovelling at her feet, had she so much as pointed a finger of suspicion at me.

"How is she now, Mrs. Hoskins? Still unconscious?" asked my companion shortly. He seemed filled with a restless impatience, and looked at the woman as though much inclined to leap at her throat and drag the words from her, without waiting for the process of articulation.

From the look she gave him I gathered that she, too, felt that time was grudged her, but she was of a rambling habit of thought, and could not concentrate, whatever the need. "She's been a-laying much as you see her, sir; but I give her them drops," she said nervously. "That's four she's had since twelve, counting—but no, I forgot—she heaved them first into the wash-bowl."

Her employer eyed her until she shifted uneasily to another foot. "She don't take the hot milk as I could wish," she ran on, as though hoping to strike something propitious, but was cut short by a stern gesture.

"The creature fairly drips with talk," my host muttered irritably.

"Would the doctor like to see the young lady?" asked the nurse amiably, while at the fatal word "young" I came well-nigh leaping into the air, and a species of death damps broke out all over me.

"It's very probable he would," came dimly to my failing senses. "That was my main object in sending for him."

Dead to irony, Mrs. Hoskins took this able stab in good part, and with a loose motion of her thumb beckoned me to follow her as she approached the dainty white bed. For a full moment, as it seemed, I stood in hang-dog uncertainty, and then, as the woman glanced back in surprise, I followed her, with a sinking at my heart which seemed really dangerous to its safety. For a long time, as it seemed, I walked and walked. Then a curtain moved aside; some one held up a smoky lamp at a better angle, and I saw—I shall never forget it—I saw before me one of the most charming women I had ever be-

held or have ever since beheld. I do not say that she was pretty; I did not get that far. I passed the analytical stage at a single bound. But I know she was charming, with her crisp, dark hair curling about her flushed cheeks, her square little chin surmounted with scarlet lips and the sauciest little nose that ever defied humanity in general. How she was dressed I cannot say, only that it was in something pink, much the colour of the bed hangings, and I think it was made up baggy, though that isn't exactly the word for it either. Her eyes were closed, for which I was humbly grateful, for had she looked at me during those first dreadful moments, she must have read me like an open book.

Somebody shoved a chair under me, and I sat down gratefully, for my knees were shaking beneath me; and then, feeling that the eyes of both Brown and Mrs. Hoskins were upon me, I realized that I must immediately do something to sustain my professional rôle. I must question them, that was plain; but what to ask!

On the rare occasion when I had been indisposed, back in my boyhood days, it had always been an overloaded stomach that had played havoc with me, and it was really the only part of the human anatomy I felt up on; but was I to hint at indigestion with this fairy-like creature before me? Never! It was not to be thought of. Her nerves? Happy thought! What could be a safer topic than the nerves of any lady? But for all that, my voice sounded hoarse with embarrassment, and I approached the subject with a timid delicacy that would have admitted me, without a chaperon, into the very heart of any nunnery extant.

"Has—has the young lady exhibited any degree of nervous excitement within the last few days?" I faltered. "Not that I wish to intrude"—but here, fortunately, the loquacious Hoskins cut me short before the miserable ending of my speech had fairly escaped my traitor lips.

"She had been dreadful oneasy like," she broke forth loosely, her eye rolling ner-

vously at Brown, who was standing, grim and statuesque, beside us. "But young wimmen is that way, you know, mostly; it's the nater of them. I was given to them spells myself some, before——"

"The doctor will attend to your symptoms later on, Mrs. Hoskins," broke in Brown frostily. "Please favour my niece's case with your entire attention at present."

"And her appetite?" I asked hastily. "Has it been quite normal, or has she shown caprice in that also?"

I was getting quite proud of my cross-examination, and a growing confidence lent me some majesty of bearing. It was evident that not the faintest suspicion of fraud had been as yet roused in the mind of either Brown or Mrs. Hoskins.

"She never do eat as one might call heavy," exclaimed the latter, poking at the pillows about the young lady's head with so rough a hand that I could scarcely restrain the impulse to reach out and drag her back. "Some days she picks at things quite hearty, and then she won't have none

of 'em, and I am at a great to do to find a thing as she will have brought a-nigh her."

"All that is easily accounted for," broke in Brown harshly, "by explaining to the doctor that she is a very high-spirited, wilful young lady. I should not have paid the slightest attention to all of those affectations, but it is this feverish stupor which has alarmed me. I have made every effort to rouse her, and I begin to think that it is genuine."

"How long has it lasted?" I asked, my voice coming very cold and hard through shut teeth; for, foolish though I might be, the suspicion that those efforts had not been of the gentlest took possession of me.

"Off and on, for a day past," broke out Mrs. Hoskins as though choking for speech. "Yesterday she took, all at once, carrying on about pains in her spine and acrost her; then she said her head went giddy on her, and from that she took a fit of hysterics quite sudden, and a lively time I had of it I can tell you. What with——"

"Your troubles will wait, Mrs. Hoskins," broke in Brown again, to whom her garrulity seemed perfectly intolerable. "Does she seem feverish to you, Doctor?"

It had come! For several moments past my eyes had been wandering to a slender white hand dropped softly upon the silken coverlet, and now I must touch that hand, must approach near to my supposed patient, though she lay in appealing, helpless maidenhood before me, and I—I had no right there. There was nothing for it, however, but to go through with the farce I had begun. Very cautiously I rose, and, as I am a large person and the bed was a little affair, when I leaned down over it, all the time murmuring prayers for my soul's sake, I completely obscured its occupant from those behind me. Timidly and reverently I touched the small hand—touched and closed my strong fingers about it, with a clinging protection in the clasp I could not control, for I am a son of Adam. To my utter undoing, the eyes, which had before remained closed, swiftly

and cautiously opened, large and black, upon me. One hasty look of entreaty and appeal they sent down straight into my soul, while the fingers I had well-nigh dropped pressed something into mine. The eyes closed again, and I, with very little breath left in my body, stood gaping vacantly before me.

It seems scarcely credible to me now, that so strange a thing could happen, and that my first vivid thought after a flash of delight at the beauty of the lady's eyes should be a bitter rage at those dreadful bandages of mine. All other considerations—the probable insanity of the patient, the wonder as to what she had forced upon me—were, for the moment, absorbed in frivolous regret that such eyes should have taken their first look at me whilst a silk handkerchief was knotted about my head, and my right eye glared upon her, swollen, inflamed, and expressionless. My poor vanity! Again it bent beneath a heavy load to bear, and I had no leisure in which to bind up its wounds.

The situation was growing frightful. "Well?" asked Brown curtly at my elbow, and with a start I drew back and faced him. "Is there a table convenient?" I asked sharply, and then, as a sop to the impatience which I saw racked him, I explained condescendingly, "as I must prepare her a soothing draught. Her fever is running pretty high."

With that I snatched up the medicine case, which seemed to follow me about without any intelligent effort on my part, and made over to the corner of the room to which slow-footed Hoskins had ambled with a second lamp.

Evidently boiling with irritation, Brown flung himself into a chair beside the bed, so that, after ridding myself of the woman by sending her for a glass of water, I was able to swiftly and stealthily examine the small object which I still held just as my fingers had closed over it. That it was a piece of paper my sense of touch had already told me; but that it was a small, torn sheet of note-paper, covered with delicate

writing done in pencil I could not have dreamed, and yet such it was. Covertly I began to examine this writing, so filled with girlish twirls and dashes as to present a pretty, but bewildering, outlook to a business eye, in the meantime keeping my back turned squarely upon Brown, who sat like some huge watchful spider beside the dainty white bed, and holding the paper where I might, at a second's notice, crush it inside the medicine chest with which I was apparently fumbling. The letter began at once, without preamble: "You doubtless have daughters of your own"—I stopped abruptly, feeling distinctly annoyed; but remembering the writer could not possibly have seen me before commencing her letter, I continued my reading with growing excitement—"and will know how to feel for a poor girl, utterly in the power of a horrid, mercenary man. I don't know what he has told you about me, but I know it isn't true. There is not a single thing the matter with me, but I took some stuff for colds

I found in a bottle to make something happen to me, so that they could send for a doctor. For I know doctors have to be respectable. It gave me a kind of feverish look, and that's all. Now please, help me away from this place to-night, this very night, without letting anybody know, for I can't stand it any longer. I must stop now, for Mrs. Hoskins is coming.

"P. S.—The dog is kept under my window; and oh, yes, I can't trust Mrs. H.

"Distractedly."

But there the letter ended. No name was given, though to sign one had evidently been the intention of the writer. And with barely enough sense left me to thrust the paper out of sight, I sat in helpless bewilderment until touched heavily on the shoulder by Mrs. Hoskins, bearing in her hand the water I had sent for and a spoon.

When Brown saw that I had been interrupted, he, too, came to my side, and the pair grouped themselves about me, and stared at me, expecting, and with reason,

that, now I had been given leisure for thought, lucid ideas must begin to flow from me, while, in reality, had I been tapped for speech at that moment, I must have babbled forth mere scraps of the perplexing chaos with which my mind was reeling.

Was the girl insane? Was it my duty to hand over the little, crumpled, confiding note to the stern dark man beside me? Never! Whether the girl was insane or not, that note was mine. If insanity had been its inspiration, some reverent hand must deal with its own folly. If not insane—what then was expected of me? Why was I warned against the dog beneath her window? Could it be that she actually meditated a theatrical flight? If so, where were the needed ladders? What was to be done with the dog?

"And how do you find her, sir?" broke in Mrs. Hoskins cheerfully. "Pretty bad, ain't she? I had a niece once that was took the same way, and we was upwards of three days a-gitting her to sense things.

If she would only take a little nateral sleep, now."

Her words came to me like an inspiration. "Blessed be thy wagging tongue, Hoskins; oh, long may it wave!" went up my mental shout, while outwardly I said a few grave things about "nerves" and "mental pressure," which seemed to hit the mark somehow, for my listeners did not jeer me, but, on the contrary, looked reasonably impressed.

"To speak candidly," I exclaimed boldly, while I was groping for words as though grappling with a foreign tongue, "I fear congestion of the nerve centres, but I can't be sure. There is nothing more illusive than these symptoms. However, I shall give her a quieting powder, and in three or four hours I shall be able to tell exactly how much we have to fear."

My proposal, which involved a long stay at the house, was not pleasing—that much I could gather from the frown upon Brown's dark face, but it excited no suspicion, and with a faint gleam of hope glowing at my

heart I took the water which Mrs. Hoskins was still holding, and after pouring out half of it with a great show of caution, managed, while apparently mixing it with the contents of a small black bottle which smelled like varnish, to drop into it half a chocolate cream which I deftly extracted from a bon-bon dish on the table at which I was working. Indeed, I felt rather shocked at the light-fingered dexterity I suddenly developed; it seemed to indicate an aptitude for questionable practices, anything but encouraging to contemplate.

They seemed to expect that I would administer my own medicine, but after covertly rinsing the candy about as long as I dared, in my guilty effort to dissolve it and colour the water a respectable brown, I handed the glass sternly to Mrs. Hoskins. I had no right to touch the impulsive girl who had thrown herself on my honor, under the false impression that I must be some peaceful old fellow, with marriageable daughters and all that, though how she could have expected any

such antiquated party to climb about through windows and toy with blood-hounds I could not, nor cannot yet, conceive. However, her innocent blunders had nothing to do with my plain course of duty, so I looked on with what grace I might while the clumsy Hoskins lifted upon her arm the slender figure, and forced my harmless dose between the scarlet lips, devoutly praying the while that the candy had all dissolved.

Very neatly did the patient do her part. Not even a professional artist could have put to shame her restless impatience, the drowsy opening of her eyes, and their soft closing.

"We must have the room perfectly quiet now," I said. "Mr. Brown, would it be possible for me to have the use of a room next to this for an hour or so? The trouble with my tooth has used me up badly; but what can I expect? When one chooses the life of a physician he chooses a dog's life, let him be clever as he will. And then look at the thanks he

gets. Let him drag a man out of his grave-clothes, and it's Providence that gets the credit, but let the man die, and how quickly Providence is let off scot free."

"And yet a doctor's fee is not a bad thing to have in one's pocket, I imagine," half-laughed, half-sneered my companion. "But come below with me, and we will have them set us out some lunch."

As may be imagined, all this talk had not been carried on in the sick-room. Gradually we had drifted out into the hall, and stood there lighted dimly by a lamp which Mrs. Hoskins carried. Of course I knew I must not go below, though the suggestion of lunch was tempting indeed; so I still held to my ungracious bluster. "You are very kind," I said severely. "But I must get my boots off and cover up warm. We physicians need some care, though our patients seem to doubt it. However," I added more graciously, "I might pick at a little cold meat, if you would send it up. That and a glass of wine wouldn't be at all bad."

"You shall have them immediately," said Brown. "But let us say a bottle of wine instead of a glass; and, by the way, sir, do you know that I have neglected to get your name? How very strange you must think me," and he paused, while his foot was actually raised to go and leave me in peace, to send that fatal broadside back into my shaky breastworks.

What under heavens was I to say? What did I know of his knowledge of the people in the city, where I was almost a total stranger?

"Well, well," I exclaimed, with a hollow laugh, "this is droll certainly, but I took it for granted that your servant had explained."

"I have not seen him," was the short reply, and Hoskins, moving forward at that moment, I stood revealed to the sharp eyes of my host in all the glare of light which the small lamp could boast.

"I am Dr. A——, of whom you have perhaps heard," I said boldly, setting fire to my ships with an unfaltering hand.

"I supposed that you had sent directly to me."

"I am something of a stranger here," was the evasive reply, and with a long look at me he was gone, leaving me in a state of feverish uncertainty as to whether I was unmasked or not.

Gladly now would I have entered the sick-room alone, on some pretext or another, in hopes of a last word of explanation, but the slow-pacing Hoskins was ever at my heels, and to all my suggestions that the young lady should be left entirely alone, and that Hoskins herself might take some sleep while I kept watch, she brought forth the same rambling argument. "A quilt in a chair, and me in it, couldn't be in any ways disturbing to one more accustomed to company than to be without," she exclaimed amiably, until I gave up, fairly worn out.

I took possession of the room assigned to me as soon as a lamp, a fire, and a neatly set lunch-table had made it ready. Once alone inside that room, the door shut on

all intruders, and brought before the bar of sober judgment, I felt that a strait-jacket was all I lacked for a fully equipped madman. Yet condemn my folly as I would, I felt no desire to retreat. Even then I might have crept down-stairs, on some pretext or other, have slunk from the house, and made off without much chance of detection. But there I sat, turning over and over again every project that presented itself to my feverish fancy for carrying out the scheme of the crumpled note, which I now boldly consulted.

Consult it as I would, however, there was nothing more to be got from it than that I was expected to help a perfect stranger, a young girl apparently confined to her bed with a serious illness, to rise from that bed and bolt through a second-story window, guarded by an ugly blood-hound, out into a freezing night, in the care of a single man, of so reckless a character that he had, earlier in the evening, hidden himself in an innocent man's carriage, killed that helpless man, taken his

belongings, and was now foisting himself upon her notice under an assumed name. A black outlook, I was forced to admit, and don't mistake me by imagining I made light of the painful circumstances. I deplored them deeply, but what would you have had?

Had the lady been plain, reason might have spoken with a louder voice, or, at least, its faint piping have been listened to; but as it was, I merely decided by the time my lunch was finished that, if anything was to be done, I must immediately set in action some one of the many operations necessary.

Hoskins? What was to be done with her? And then, from all I could recall of her personality beyond her loosely balanced tongue, and the fact that she was large and dark, one little thing came back to me which brought me to my feet, a hopeful smile struggling with the swollen melancholy of my features. She had a very red nose, which might result from a disordered stomach and might not.

An Eventful Night

Very softly I opened the door of my room, for I had no wish to disturb the slumbers of the rest of the household, and very softly I tiptoed to the door of the sick-room, which I found standing a few inches ajar; on account of the heat I surmised, for I could feel the hot air fanning my face as I peered in cautiously before entering.

Everything was quiet. The bed I could not see plainly, but before the fire, which was blazing brightly, Mrs. Hoskins sat leaning back comfortably in a huge rocker, while her feet, in reckless disregard of the laws of grace and decorum, were hoisted upon a second chair, where they had slid from the red woollen blanket which had been wrapped about them, and confronted me as I approached, huge and motionless in their grey woollen casings, like sentinels before a sleeping city. For Mrs. Hoskins was sleeping. But even as I saw it, and moved back with my heart thumping violently at the swift thought that, before waking her, that word of explanation I

might, as my right, demand, could be spoken, she started peevishly awake.

"Lor' a mercy," she muttered pettishly, her eyes glaring at me wild and bleared; but she followed me willingly enough when I beckoned her into the hall, where we might talk without disturbing our patient.

"Was she took any way that you heard?" she asked in a hoarse whisper, her mouth working with an abortive yawn. "I'm troubled with inflaming of the lids, an' set mostly with my eyes shut. It's more saving on 'em than glasses, besides being more handy."

"I have been thinking over all possible causes for this attack," I exclaimed with the absorbed air of a medical fanatic. "Has the young lady been in the habit of drugging herself? Does she ever use opiates of any kind to make her sleep?" and I glared at the woman as sternly as the limited use of my right eye would admit. Her wits were fogged with sleep and stirred slowly, but after staring dully at me for a moment, she brightened visibly, evidently

fired with the hope of answering and getting rid of me. "Yes, sir," she answered eagerly, "she do sometimes use a powder, an' it's often an' often I've told her she hadn't orter; but—she's that stubborn and set, you'd hardly believe it, when she gets a notion."

"She has some left? Bring them," I said sternly. "I shall sift this matter to the bottom."

"Upwards of a dozen, I should say, sir," and with a step heavy with sleep she moved away, returning after a few moments with a small green box in her hand. "These are 'um," she said, giving vent to a mighty yawn which had been convulsing her since she started from her sleep.

"You look all used up," I said, fastening a professional eye upon her. "You need something to brace you up. Have you nothing in there that you can take, a little wine, now, or even a drop of straight whiskey?"

Ah, I had not been mistaken. Her eyes lighted greedily, and then were overcast

with helpless resentment. "I haven't a drop of nothing," she said sullenly. "Mr. Brown is not of the thoughtful kind, and makes no reckoning of the wear and tear of being broke of one's sleep as a stiddy thing. Them that goes to bed regular," she added morosely, "can little estimate the needs of them that must set awake in their hours of rest."

"That is very true," I remarked austerely. "But I shall have a word to say about that to-night. I can't have you wearing out suddenly just when I may need you. Wait here for a moment," and, highly gratified with my clever trick, I took the box of powders and hurried back to my room, where, after pouring out a liberal glass of wine, I stood debating what next. On the box I read, "Miss Brandon. One powder every hour until relieved." So my young friend's name was Brandon. "Until relieved"—that meant, of course, until she should fall asleep. But surely if one powder was prescribed for so dainty an invalid, at least double that dose

should be allowed for the great, robust creature I had just left, and hastily shaking in the contents of two of the folded papers, I rushed back into the hall where my victim was awaiting me.

With what pleasure and self-congratulation did I watch her drain the glass to its uttermost dregs! Then we separated; she going her way to fall asleep, as I told myself, inside of the next five minutes, and I mine, to gloat in secret over the easy victory I had won. Five minutes I waited in restless inaction, and then felt tempted to go and view my work. But there was no hurry, and taking a chair by the fire, I had determined to wait patiently for another five, when the sound of shuffling steps in the hallway outside brought me to my feet in vague alarm.

Had my fraud been discovered? Had Dr. A—— come back to life and followed me? My hand flew to my pocket, where it grasped a small penknife, my sole weapon, when the door opened, and in walked Mrs. Hoskins in a state of feverish excitement.

She was carrying a box in her hand, a blue one this time, and she flung it down before me with a most disrespectful display of ill-temper. "Them's the sleeping powders," she snapped, laying her hand upon her head with a reeling motion while I stared at her in lively horror. "But how is one to tell, with writin' worse than them as don't lay claim to be no scholards? Lor' help me, them spirits went straight to my head," she went on. "Which is rightly your hand, sir?" snatching vacantly into the air beside me. "You look to have a dozent."

What had I done? In the name of mercy, of what had I given a double dose to the poor creature? Wildly I turned over in my mind all possible poisons and their antidotes: milk, oil, whites of eggs, all danced before me. Women sometimes, I had heard, took dreadful things for their complexions. Was there to be a second corpse on my hands that night? And yet, once more, it had not been my fault.

Rushing at the tottering woman, I got

her into a chair, gazing at her as I did in such an agony of fear, lest she drop dead in my grasp, that she took the alarm herself, and making certain that death was near, turned such a greenish white that, without reasoning what I was about, I seized another tumbler of the spirits and dashed it down her throat, with scarcely more caution than I would have used had I pitched it into the kitchen drain. Fear of her immediate death, that and that only, was my motive in stocking her thus heavily with the strong liquor, and what followed cannot be laid at my door, excepting in the form of an unmerited accident. Yet I understand there are those who do not take the same view of the matter.

At first the poor creature choked, which I will admit was my fault in that I forced the liquor on her so abruptly. I was sorry for my awkward zeal, and aided her to the best of my power to regain her breath, patting her violently upon the back, while her gurgling, though deep, was low. But

once she had passed this stage, I saw what that second glass had done; saw reason leave her eye and give place to a silly stupor; saw and flung a pillow upon the floor to which she shambled and sank down babbling.

"I'm feeling very comfortable, thank you," she gabbled as I strove to drag her farther from the fire; "but my head ain't what it should be. Too much setting up of nights has done it."

But I heard no more. Fleeing my second victim, I hurried across the hall, to tap as light as a feather against the door of the sick-room, though had my own ears been all I cared to reach, the loud thumping of my heart at that moment would have equalled the booming of any cannon.

As though my timid knuckles had touched some hidden spring, the door responded instantly, and through a slight aperture a wisp of dark hair waved, and the gleam of a fine eye shone on me, as a whispering voice asked me what I wanted.

"It is I," I faltered idiotically, forget-

ting that I had as yet no identity with my questioner beyond the rather vague one of a medical man. "I'm the doctor, you know," I added huskily, my tongue refusing me the service of a glib lie.

"Oh," with a most delightful inflection, and the door swung an inch or two farther open; but in place of accepting this friendly advance, I skulked back into the shade of the unlit hall like a sheepish assassin.

"Where is Mrs. Hoskins?" came in the same guarded whisper. "Look out for her, she may be hiding somewhere. She does that lots, and then dodges out. Oh, she's just horrid!"

"She won't now. She—she's asleep," I faltered. "I gave her something—some of your powders," but no sooner had I uttered the words than I repented my confession. What if, after all, it was not the wine which had affected her; what if even then she was breathing her last, in some horrid death agony! The thought was sickening.

"Oh, oh, how awfully clever!" And there was a sound as of soft hands beaten together gently. "But the dog!" was the next dismayed exclamation. "They've let him out again. I heard him champing about down there just a moment ago. Oh, you may depend on it, we can never get out if he isn't done away with."

I had forgotten the brute, and I must confess that but for the gleam of that fine eye, which had grown plainer and developed into a pair, I should have felt much vexed at the reminder. If I could only give him sleeping powders! My ear hearkened painfully for the slightest sound from the room I had left. "Oh, I think we can manage the dog all right," I said lightly, while not the faintest plan as to how I was to make good my words suggested itself to my mind. In the mood I then was I could have strangled any beast with my naked hands, and relished the details of the task at that.

"Oh, how awfully clever you are!" came in an admiring gasp from behind the half-

open door. "But if you're going to shoot, please let me know before you set the gun off, or I shall be sure to scream. I always do."

"I shall not shoot," I said with a patience begot of the fine eyes and fluffy hair. "It wouldn't do, you know. The noise would——"

"Why, to be sure!" with a soft little laugh. "It would make a mess of everything, but you see I'm so stupid. Goodbye now. I'll get dressed and be all ready," and the door shut gently in my face, leaving me standing alone in the darkness gaping helplessly about me.

"All ready," she said. I could have laughed aloud, but that I felt more inclined for tears. All ready for what? Well, I could not improve matters by standing there, so with a reluctant step I turned to re-enter the chamber I had left.

What should I see? A horrid, staring corpse, a miserable frothing object all but gone, yet with strength left to rise and

curse me? If so, good-bye even to fine eyes and soft, dark hair. I had stood a great deal that night, but there were limits, I felt, to my endurance.

With a sinking heart I pushed the door open, only to jump back in hysterical amazement. The woman was afoot again, and babbling foolishly! What was to be done? How gladly then would I have exchanged her for the corpse I had so dreaded to see! There was little sense in what she said, but I made out that she was looking for Miss Brandon, and I managed to quiet that cry by telling her Miss Brandon was asleep, and must not be disturbed, at the same time tearing about in search of something to do with her while she trailed at my heels with dog-like devotion.

And then her intoxication, if such I can call it, began to take alarming forms, which preyed dreadfully on my conscience. Her vision grew shockingly distorted, and what with her resolution to follow me about, and the number of me she seemed to see, she was forever taking imaginary

walks with me in parts of the room where I was not, talking as readily to any piece of furniture as to me, and never finding out her mistake unless she happened to run against me.

"Heavings above," she would whisper hoarsely to a tall dresser by the window, "I can't rightly make out, Doctor, how it is you come to be so leggy all of a suddint;" and then to the washstand, as I chased her there: "Give her nateral sleep, Doctor, give her nateral sleep, and she'll pull through somehow. I've said it before, an' I say it now, sleep is what we need, and plenty of it."

It was a shameful situation, and what was worse, I distinctly heard steps below. The creature's babbling tongue had started some one awake. With a desperate hand I jerked open the next door to me, and when I found it admitted me to a small, dark closet I did not hesitate. "Miss Brandon is in here," I hissed in the woman's ear, snatching her frantically by the arm. "Go in and lie down beside her.

It will keep her quiet, and then you can have your sleep out."

She obeyed me in the same dog-like manner in which she had followed me about, and although, in the face of this docility, it seemed a brutal act, I turned the key securely upon her, feeling an almost murderous thrill of satisfaction as her murmuring died away in the denser stupor into which the confined air of the place plunged her.

And none too soon did those mutterings cease, for I now distinctly heard steps mounting the stairs, with evident care not to tread too roughly. Not daring to meet any questioner where I then was, I rushed softly into the hall, where the happy conception seized me of affecting to be just on the point of leaving the sick-room, when my visitor should come up. It was well, though, that the darkness of the hall concealed my guilt-stained features, or the merest child must have detected some mischief brewing.

"Is that you, Doctor?" came in a growl-

ing whisper from Brown, while a firm, cool hand seized me so suddenly I all but shrieked, so shattered was my self-control. "What in the —— are you up to, anyhow? It sounded as though a pair of you were dancing the minuet. I thought an order for quiet was given."

"And so it was," I managed to say coldly, as a man without humour who feels himself affronted with a jest. "But I hope that does not interfere with Mrs. Hoskins heating flannels at my orders for your niece, now that her fever has suddenly left her."

Brown gave a soft whistle. "To be sure not," he said with more civility; "I intended no disrespect, I assure you, but kindly ask Hoskins to toe-and-heel it in her stocking feet hereafter."

"Sir!" exclaimed I irritably.

"I'm a wretched sleeper," he explained, coming hastily back to dignified discourse, "and Hoskins should know it. I can't imagine how she had the temerity to go crashing about so."

Shivering like a wind-swept reed, I waited for him to demand that he should see his niece, or call for the disgraced Hoskins, but these trials were not laid upon me, for now with a restless yawn he left me, after a mild hope for the further improvement of his niece, and when the last echoes of his steps had died away I crept back to the room I had left, and stood trembling there for some moments before I could be certain that he had really gone, with no suspicion to bring him creeping up those stairs again.

For ten minutes I waited, while the house was silent as the grave. Not a board creaked, not a curtain rustled. Then, drawing off my shoes, I made softly across to a window which I reasoned must look out upon the place where the ferocious bloodhound lurked. Inch by inch, like a trained housebreaker, I raised the sash, my heart stopping dead still at the faintest creak, then rushing on with congestive jerks at an easy slide, until finally it was propped up at a height to

admit of putting out my head and shoulders.

Cautiously I peered forth into the darkness; for dark it was, with only a star glimmering here and there, and nothing but faint outlines of the jagged mountain peaks showing themselves against the sky. The air was keen and cold, and the ground covered with a skim of hard, dry snow. A nice night, indeed, for people to be launching themselves from second-story windows and taking to their heels through unknown frozen districts!

"We'll end up at the bottom of a cañon with a fractured bone or two for company," I muttered as I let my gaze roam despondently about. "There's the dog, sure enough," as my eyes, becoming more accustomed to the darkness, made out a moving, black body on the snow beneath.

It is one thing to look down at a dog from a second-story window, and another, and quite a different thing, to rid yourself quietly of him. On any other night I should have exclaimed, "Impossible," and

tamely closed the window. But on this special night my mind seemed fairly lurid with bright thoughts. I suddenly sped back to the table, clutched the napkin from my lunch tray, and found that I had not exhausted the generous supply of cold meat sent up for my refreshment. With trembling fingers I spread out the contents of the medicine chest upon a chair close by, and began in a purblind fashion to study the different labels.

Confusion seized upon my mind at the first row. How could medical men pretend to understand such gibberish? My mind had not been neglected in my youth, and yet I could make nothing of it. Defeat stared me in the face; but with a cold, proud smile, I counted the number of bottles I had before me. Then with a few bold slashes I had the meat quartered and lying ready to my hand.

This done, and the bottles divided into four different sets, and ranged conveniently about me, my real work began. The first relay of bottles came to me in the

form of powders. I dipped section number one of my meat supply in the milk jug before I attempted to smear it over with as much of the powdery stuff as I could make hang on, being careful to take a fair amount from each bottle, in hopes that in some one of them lay the deadly drug I sought. It was remarkable how much I made that piece of cold beef hold. When not another grain would stick I gathered it up gingerly, crept to the window, took accurate aim, and flung it straight at the feet of the restless animal.

They must have kept the brute half starved, for with a plunge and a snap he seemed to catch the morsel while it was yet in the air. But nothing happened; his restless walk went on, and impatiently I rushed back to my ghastly work. This time it was liquids with which I had to deal, and my work was easier, but how they smelled! The house seemed reeking with their biting fumes, and it was with streaming eyes I again sought the window, and stood with my second prescription sus-

pended over the hazy space below. No need to peer about in the darkness now in search of my restless prey. The animal expected me, and crouched directly beneath my window, where the light from the lamp shone, upon his gaunt frame, revealing him with his huge jaws distended; a pretty sight for one who might at any moment be pitched forth to become his midnight lunch. Out went my second lot. I could see him plainly this time. He met it, his full length from the ground, with an appetite perfectly disheartening. Not even its horrid smell fazed him, and down it went with a dreadful champing sound.

While completely discouraged, I turned again to the table. What did Dr. A—— keep in his chest, anyhow? Drugs designed solely for the use of teething children? And yet who could tell? Perhaps my method might be bad. I might be doing up poisons and antidotes in the same bundle. This time I mixed powders and liquids with an impartial and liberal hand,

but it was with only the faintest hope that I gathered up my third dose, and again sought my post at the window. The dog was not there! Was not there, nor was he dead! I could see him, see him plainly, if that mass of moving snow and fur could be a dog. Faint, angry yelps rose from the tossing heap, and my heart stood still. Then, suddenly, as I looked, the mass took shape, and rose and ran as nothing dependent on mere legs ever ran before, melting away into the darkness beyond, with a long, low howl which struck stone-cold upon my fainting heart.

"We are undone," I all but cried, for that mournful howl must set even the cocks crowing upon their roosts! Then came the thought that speed might even yet save us, for once outside, who was to follow us in such darkness, with enough and more than enough of caverns about into which we might crawl and evade pursuit? Why we were doing it at all, and what right we had to evade pursuit, I had no time to consider as again I fled the

room, which was strewn all about with evidences of my late traffic in animal life. The disordered boxes which had been handed me by the now helpless Hoskins; the uncorked medicine phials, all spoke loudly to me of my deadly work, and I could but feel like some beast of prey creeping from its lair, as I stole out and closed the door behind me.

This time my knock at the door of the second chamber was less guarded, for my nerves were getting into a horrible state; but it was not so quickly answered, and I was growing alarmed, when it was flung wide open, though very noiselessly, and Miss Brandon stood before me, not dressed in her flowing robes, but in a trim suit of black, such as you might see a dozen of any day in a well-dressed crowd, only they would not all be so becoming to their owners. Over this she wore a short fur coat. Her hair was tucked away under a cap to match, and there she stood, looking so warm, so fresh and smiling, that somehow the memory of my bandages came back to

me, filling me with such a sense of deformity and inferiority that I think my bearing took colour from the morbid abasement of my mind.

I know that I held my right eye with one hand while I talked to her, and that I shuffled on my feet as she looked at me, while I bit my tongue to keep from crying aloud that I was not the bloodless old dotard she so fondly dreamed me to be.

"Oh," she burst out in an excited whisper as soon as her eyes fell on me, "you do think of the funniest things! Now tell me whatever you have done to that dreadful dog to make him go running about so, scratching things!"

"Did you hear him yelping?"

"I guess that's what dogs do. I was just sure he'd wake everybody up, weren't you?"

I had been, indeed, and yet was. At that very moment I fancied I could hear some one moving, and bracing up my manhood, I spoke decidedly in spite of those things about my jaw.

"We must go at once," I said, moving into the room with a cat-like step. "Will you be able to hang on to one end of a blanket while I lower you from the window?"

I dared not look at her while I made this cool proposal, for I fully expected her to turn pale and shrink back; besides, the horrid suspicion haunted me that, even should she consent, it would end in her completing my list of victims, and what with the doctor, Mrs. Hoskins, and the dog, I was sickened of blood.

To my amazement she laughed—a delightful, gentle, little chuckle which made me long more keenly than ever to bury the snuffy old doctor and rise myself to fill his shoes.

"Oh, how perfectly killing it will be!" she whispered, seeking for sympathy in the depths of my dull, swollen eye. "See! The window is all ready for us. I was putting it up when I saw the dog."

Suddenly I started, stabbed to the heart with fresh trouble. I had dragged a

blanket from the large chair in which Mrs. Hoskins had been sitting, and was testing its strength as best I could, when it occurred to me that all my out-door apparel was down-stairs. I certainly could not venture out on such a night, not knowing how long I might remain dodging about, without some sort of covering, yet I dared not go down-stairs in search of mine.

"My cap and coat," was the cry wrung from me in my distress. Instantly my companion grasped the situation with smiling composure.

"Are down-stairs," she finished for me. "Of course we can't think of going to get them, but there are some of Mrs. Hoskins' things here that will do. She's so dreadfully big, you know," and before I could prevent her, she had dived into a closet close at hand, from which she emerged presently, triumphantly holding up to my view a large grey and black plaid shawl and one of those many-coloured woollen bags known as "toboggan caps." It was the last straw to my overburdened vanity!

Wear them! I could have snatched them from her, flung them on the floor at her feet, and stamped upon them, but for the added absurdity. And then, too, what awkward evidence in the shape of card-case, marked handkerchief, or other fatal trifle might I not leave in the pockets of my abandoned coat!

Insulted, perplexed, and downright angry, I stood glaring about me, but before I had voiced my annoyance a faint sound below put flight to all thought of more trifling discomforts. Some one was moving cautiously, whether towards us or from us, to seek or avoid, I could not tell; but it decided me to haggle no longer over my appearance, good or bad. Literally snatching the horrible headgear from Miss Brandon, who was tranquilly kneading it into shape, I crammed it down about my ears, feeling a certain savage delight in the self-torture I inflicted.

"It will be warm, anyway," murmured my companion, with a glance of kindly amusement which I haughtily ignored.

"Come," I said briefly, snatching up the blanket, "we have not a second to lose," and I rushed stealthily to the open window, and flung out in advance the shawl which was to serve me as a covering, Miss Brandon following me in a state of what, I could plainly see, was pleased excitement.

The window was high up from the floor, and as we stopped before it she looked into my swollen eye with a face of innocent expectation: "I can't get up there alone, you know," she whispered, and with an almost audible groan I put my arm gingerly about her fur-clad waist, and the next instant she was sitting with her feet outside, holding towards me her ungloved hands for the blanket. The morbid fear which possessed me that she was to make my fourth victim was not lessened by that moment in which I held her in my arms, and as she grasped the quilt with two small white hands and looked at me with a friendly nod, to tell me that she was ready for the drop, I felt every particle of strength leave my body.

"Come back," I faltered, but she was over the side, and with desperate hands I clutched the blanket.

It seemed so short. Had I miscalculated the height of the window? I dared not look down as I leaned far out, giving the full length of my arms to the clumsy contrivance. Suddenly the weight left it. Had she fallen? My eyes seemed glazed as I turned them downwards. There was a black heap upon the snow beneath. Was she living or dead?

But now again sounded that step below. It seemed nearer this time. It was coming upstairs, coming softly, and pausing on each step, as though some one had stopped to listen. It had a horrid sound in that gloomy house, and I seemed to see a dark face gliding toward me, a white hand uplifted, to hush the very echoes that he might hear. I had meant to do many things the time for which was passed. The closet door—I had meant to unlock it upon the hapless Hoskins, but now the feet had reached the hall. With

a warning hiss for my conspirator below, I swung myself from the window and dropped, speculating, even while I fell, on the probable length of my life should some part of me double up and strike wrong in my mad plunge.

The window was either higher than I had calculated, or I fell upon slanting ground, for I struck so solidly that I had the breath knocked out of me, and when my senses became clear again, I found that Miss Brandon had set me upright, and was dabbing at me with frozen snow, and setting my cap straight upon my head, with a freedom she would never have exercised had she not learned to regard me as a harmless married creature who could safely be tumbled about.

Thrusting aside the snow with no gentle hand, for her daughterly care was growing perfectly intolerable, I was instantly upon my feet.

"Run," I whispered, and we ran, she like a spirited young deer in its first encounter with the hounds, and I—really,

after the way I spun along that night, I cannot see how she could suspect such a pair of heels as I showed to the old house behind us of having learned to potter about in carpet slippers.

Quick as our flight had been, it was begun none too soon; for by the time the darkness swallowed us, the whole house seemed suddenly to blaze up with hurrying lights, while a loud shout reached us and increased our pace. Suddenly, right in our path, a man sprang up, waving his arms before us, as at a runaway horse. He may have been a harmless citizen. Possibly he was only startled at our sudden appearance, but as to that I shall never be certain, for I had no time to question him nor reason with him. All that I could do was to knock him down, which I did with such brutal awkwardness that he collapsed without a struggle, and my knuckles were badly grazed against the poor creature's skull.

"Dear me, I hit too hard," I muttered, in answer to a little shriek from Miss

Brandon, and then we brought up against a stone wall, on a level with my head as to height, and jagged as broken glass.

"Oh, my gracious!" gasped Miss Brandon. "Whatever will we do—and, say, do you think the man is dead?"

"More than likely," I groaned, making a grim note of my fourth victim. "Can you jump, Miss Brandon?"

"Yes, yes. Oh, do hurry!" she whispered; and taking her waist in both hands, I gave her a mighty lift, which she seconded with a spring so light that it set her upon the top of the wall, gazing anxiously down at me, at least I judged her to be anxious by her voice.

"How will you ever make it?" she whispered, leaning down until I was in agony lest she should fall. "Dear me, your poor hands! Oh, oh!" in pitying horror, as I dug my way up the side, breathless and bloody, nearly losing my unsightly cap, and suffering the ignominy of having her again clap it upon my head.

"However do you keep so limber?" she

murmured admiringly, as, gnashing my teeth at her friendly service, I sat for one second to catch my breath. "I hope you didn't kill that man, though. You must have hit him in the wrong place."

"I'm afraid I did," I stammered guiltily. "We were running hard, you know."

"Yes, I know," she said hastily and soothingly, and then severely: "Coming on to you in the dark that way, how could he expect to be hit right?"

"We must go," I said. "Are you ready?"

"Yes, and I have your shawl," she said sweetly.

"My shawl!" At that moment I would have frozen to a brittle mass before I would have touched the thing, but I was still warm from running, so my manhood was not tempted. Down I went on the opposite side of the wall. At the same moment I saw the door burst open by some one, who rushed headlong into the yard. "Quick! quick!" I called to my companion, and without a question as to why, she

dropped tranquilly into my arms, a delicate shape, all warm and furry.

"Do you know which way to go?" I muttered, as I quickly released her.

"I haven't the faintest idea," came the cheerful whisper, and then we were off running again, with more care of our strength, this time, and I possessed by lively expectations that at any moment we might puncture some snowdrift and find that it was but the upper crust of a bottomless abyss. The main road we must not take, even could we find it, which seemed anything but likely; and we plunged about, knee-deep in snow. Blankness of fear settled on me as I realized the dangers we were facing. "Who ever saw anything so pitchy-blank as this night?" I exclaimed, peevish with alarm for my companion; for myself, the gallows seemed so imminent that all lesser terrors paled before it.

"Yes, but it's the only thing that saves us, you know," tranquilly observed Miss Brandon, as I picked her out of a small

ditch. "But what's that snuffling about so?" and she shrank towards me in a way that shook my moral nature again to its very centre.

It was the dog. A changed dog, indeed, with all its fury spent, and nothing much you could call dog left about it, but a draggled shape and tumbled fur; yet still dangerous to us if it was disposed to haunt our path, for who could tell at what moment it might break out into the melancholy baying which had before alarmed us.

"I must kill it," I muttered to myself, but Miss Brandon heard me, and faintly screamed.

"Oh, dear," she wailed, "what dreadful things we seem to be doing all of the time! First that man, and now the dog. It makes us seem like bloody-minded creatures."

"Run on a few steps, please, to that tree," I said gently.

With a little shudder she obeyed me, putting her fingers in her ears as she ran, while I, pouncing like a huge bat upon

my prey, soon put as merciful an end to him as possible, considering my only weapon was my pocket-knife.

Once dead, though, he must be hidden, and in great haste I tumbled snow and brush upon him. Then—for I either heard voices or all the excitement I had been through was rendering me fanciful—I rose and ran towards the spot where I expected to find Miss Brandon, only to spring back, barely restraining a shout of terror. She was gone!

"They have taken her," I gasped, a sudden blank regret which I had no time to analyze sweeping over me. Then, setting my teeth, I plunged forward, and with two strides found myself stepping off into space. The fifteen or twenty minutes during which I seemed to be steadily falling gave me the impression of being infinite. But I finally struck, fortunately for my earthly career, in a bed of snow, through which I rolled and gasped, fetching up at last with a painful thump against something so solid that my airy, light-

headed sensation of infinite space was immediately swallowed up in acute physical pain.

"Oh, so you fell, too!" exclaimed some one close beside me. "How queer we should both do it! Really now, we ought to be thankful; it might have been quite unpleasant."

"Might have been quite unpleasant." And there I sat, with every part of my clothing filled with melting snow and my head ringing. Really, if she had been a plain woman—but here! I belie myself. I have quite a reputation for courtesy, and I think that I partially deserve it, for, after coughing up much melted snow, I asked her, in a strangled voice, if she was injured in any way.

"Not the least bit in the world," she answered cheerfully, whipping at the back of my collar with her handkerchief. "My, but you're full of snow, though! Do you know, it is so funny; but I actually brought your shawl the whole way down here with me! You'd better put it on

now, and warm up. You may have strained yourself somehow, but they say if you keep warm you won't stiffen."

That shawl again! It was too much!

"Miss Brandon," I cried, excitedly springing to my feet, then I stopped abruptly, and taking her by the arm drew her as far back as possible in the shelter of the rock against which I had grazed in my fall. "Hush, hush!" I whispered uselessly, for she had made no attempt to speak, and I pointed upwards as I crouched beside her, for lights were beginning to dot the gloom above us in many places; hurrying lights, held low and tearing headlong, like so many burning eyeballs.

"They have tracked us," I groaned, for I heard a shout. "There is nothing for it, we must run again. But which way? This thing seems to begin and end in snow."

"Oh, there's no great hurry," said my companion coolly, with a little nod which I could see plainly as I gazed at her in horror. "I shall get my breath first, and

besides there is some snow down my collar, which must be got out or I shall be in a dreadful condition."

"But, Miss Brandon," I protested sternly, "they are close upon us; they——"

She gave a good-natured little laugh. I could scarcely believe it, but she did. "How funny men are!" she said pleasantly, working at her collar, with success I knew, for bits of snow flew into my horror-stricken face as I leaned over her. "Why, don't you see that the fun of it is they must take their time about getting here? They won't dare just walk up and fall down as we did. It wouldn't do, you know. One might hit wrong. You came pretty near it."

It was perfectly true, but it made me seem painfully stupid to have to take such plain sense second-hand, and from a young girl at that. We could not get out, that was clear enough. It was equally clear, when I considered it, that they could not get down to us without returning to the house for ropes, or ladders, for no sane

man would deliberately take such a leap in that pitchy darkness.

Oh, for some outlet! I was teeming with inspirations, but, alas! they were encased in clumsy flesh. A sudden bright flame from the freshest of them brought me to my feet, where a pair of sordid heels blew out the illumination, and down I came upon my back, with the end of my tongue well-nigh bitten through from the shock.

"Oh, do be careful!" wailed Miss Brandon, dragging at my shoulders to set me upright, while I muttered something beneath my breath which I shall not record. Another shout reached us—a fierce, excited shout. Had they found the spot where I had performed my clumsy execution of the dog? If so, murder or suicide must be their inevitable conclusion, and they would be hot after the survivor. There must be no longer delay. Breath or no breath, we must do something before it was too late. "Come, Miss Brandon," I said firmly, and taking her by the arm I lifted her to her feet, only for us both to

lose our balance together and go skating away upon a new-found icy incline.

It was clear to me now where we were. We were adrift upon the frozen bed of one of those mountain streams about whose summer music my sister had discoursed in her letters home. I remembered well how she had made them "leap from rock to rock," hide themselves in granite caverns, "and then burst forth again all fierce and tortured from their brief restraint," all of which had sounded well in the letters; but when it came to sliding down this ice-clad winding idyll, with a delicate young lady for your companion, a band of desperadoes scouring along the mountain side in search of you, no coat on your back, and the memory of two dead men and a dead dog behind you, making the thought of your probable venture into the next world something to be avoided if possible,—I could have wished the "windings in and out" a shade less fantastic, and would have entirely omitted that "bounding from rock to rock," had choice been given me.

In the darkness I could not estimate the length of our first fall, for I distrusted my reckoning made in mid-air; but that it was considerable seemed clear from the subdued sound of the men's voices, even when, as I reasoned, they must be almost directly above us. And that our lives were saved by the heavy accumulation of snow on which we struck, but on which no one would dare to count if making a wanton leap, was proved to me beyond a doubt. In the light of our late leap it was madness to make fresh ventures. And yet it was an ignominious thought—that of sitting there until ladders were brought, and we were dug out and carried back. Had it been broad daylight, with nothing behind to drive us, I now feel certain that I should never have left my soft nest in those snow banks. Certainly, I should never have drawn Miss Brandon from hers; but as it was, we went on, and happily I seemed possessed with the off-hand indifference of a sleep-walker. I saw not, and yet I could walk. I

used no reason, but a sort of dull instinct.

As for my companion, nothing could exceed her cheerful indifference to our surroundings, and although I knew perfectly well that this condition rose entirely from her utter ignorance of all the common laws, rules, and usages she was trampling under her pretty feet, what was I to do? Death shrieked at her in every chill breath that blew about our shivering forms, and threatened her with every clinging snowdrop which fastened itself upon her garments, and she—she said, "Dear me, how sharp," to the icy wind, and bent her head to meet its force, and flapped off the clinging snow with graceful petulance.

How many times in our wild course down the stream's bed only a hair's breadth separated us from certain destruction I will not attempt to guess. Certainly we must often have been so near to the dark river that its murmurings might have reached our ears. We were a snow slide, an avalanche, anything you please but human beings, and I,

for one, became accustomed to travelling considerable stretches upon the back of my head, while that detested shawl I dignified into a sort of pad for Miss Brandon in some of our straighter shoots.

I don't know that we travelled very far this way. I am quite certain that we did not, but I have been to other continents and back since with less seeming expenditure of time, and have never, before or since, viewed with such joy any inanimate object as I did the light which suddenly appeared before us, not many yards away. A poor, mean light it was, coming from some smoky lamp, I fancied, and shining through the window of a miner's hut; but no blaze of glory ever thrilled my heart with such gratitude.

"Look, look, Miss Brandon!" I cried, and then we both fell again, to alight upon comparatively level ground, not far from the hut and its cheering light. But when I raised my companion from the ground, she lay in my arms limp and motionless, a cut on her forehead, and a

dark stream trickling down over her still features.

I thought her dead, and a great madness seemed to possess me. Snatching her close against me, I ran, with no sense of her weight, through a door-yard thickly strewn with snow-covered objects, like lumps of wood, old buckets, and other litter. Stumbling among them as I did, I came to no stop, but bounding blindly over the last thing in my path, I brought my knuckles upon the door with a sudden, loud thump, which I had not the humanity to realize must bring the heart into the throat of any solitary dweller in that lonely place.

No answer came. I grew furious, and from pounding with my knuckles, fell to hammering with my fists, and then to kicking, all the time shouting for admittance in a voice so hoarse with fatigue and excitement that it must have sounded like the croaking of some asthmatic madman. A fiercer kick than all at length brought the door open, with an explosion of wood and nails that made even the insensible

girl in my arms start up with a cry of terror; and that cry, which told that life had not deserted her, brought me back with a rush of shame to my surroundings.

Filled with misgivings at my mode of entrance, I gazed about, at first seeing no one, and then I spied, drawn up at bay in a far corner, the gaunt figure of a woman clutching in one hand a huge meat knife, which she brandished with a slow, paralyzed movement of terror. She was dressed after a fashion, having got one arm through some sort of a coarse woollen wrapper, but her feet were bare, and her long toes curled up like talons.

"Stand back!" she called, in a quavering voice, and then as I did not, but crowded myself yet farther in, all spent and dishevelled as I was, covered with snow and staggering beneath the weight of the fainting girl, she set up such a series of shrieks as drowned every attempt at consolation or apology, screaming out, and asking to be protected from every crime on the calendar.

"Madam!" I shrieked, in an attempt to drown a double call for murder and thieves, "no one intends to harm you. Oblige me with a little wine or brandy." I might as well have screamed into the face of a whirlwind.

Then, in happy inspiration, I undertook a dumb show that I wanted drink for Miss Brandon, pointing to her as she lay in the chair where I had placed her, drawing my hand across my throat to indicate that it was dry, then raising imaginary bottles to my lips. I cannot think what she imagined, but her terror took a new and this time silent form. She ceased to shriek, but with a sudden rush of her bare toes across the floor, shot from my sight into a small closet or pantry, immediately slamming the door, and applying an eye at once to a good-sized knot-hole just above the knob. I suppose it was the state of my nerves, for I can make no one quite understand the feeling it gave me to know that the one staring eye was upon me and that, whichever way I turned, it would fol-

low me—follow me as I moved Miss Brandon in her chair nearer the smouldering fire, follow me while I wrapped the shawl about her and fiercely poked the sticks of sputtering wood. All the time there was a stealthy, rattling sound coming from the closet, which somehow bore in upon me the impression that with one long arm the woman was gradually raking everything movable within easy reach. Why, I could not guess, until happening near the door in my desperate search for drink, it was jerked open a few inches, and a tin skillet was flung at me through the aperture.

"Stop that, woman!" I called sternly, for, though the action had broken somewhat the spell of that immovable eye, the situation was such a disgraceful one!

"Then go 'way and lemme alone, or you'll git the sad-irons next," came the dogged answer, and I could hear her hard-drawn breath rushing through the keyhole.

There was no time to be lost. I was meditating means of obtaining what I desired without misusing the woman, when

a languid voice recalled me to Miss Brandon's side, and to my great relief I found her sitting up, wiping the blood from her face, and looking quite herself. "Oh, do take me out of this horrid place," she whispered fearfully, glancing at the closet door with such an expression of terror that I wondered if she, too, could feel that eye upon her.

"I must get something to refresh you first, and something to carry us back to town," I whispered in return, and then I advanced carelessly towards the door, only to be met with the promised "sad-iron," hurled at me with a right good will. Evidently our hostess was determined I should parley with her only at a distance, and I saw that I must humour her, for a nervous cry from Miss Brandon warned me to tamper no further with her overstrained nerves.

"Madam," I said pleasantly, retreating some steps and addressing myself strictly to the eye, which was again at its post, "could you make any use of a five-dollar

bill?" And I ostentatiously flourished one before the knot-hole, then placed it carelessly on the table. There was a perfect silence at this, and I produced a second. "If so," I said jauntily, "you probably might prefer two," and I laid a second boldly beside the first.

I was sure of the eye now; its greedy blink was not to be mistaken. A moment passed, then the eye drew back. Plates, cups, and other things rattled a retreat to the shelves; the door creaked upon its rusty hinges. First a head, and then a neck appeared, then shoulders, and finally the woman was before us again, entirely in her dress this time, and with a consciousness of her bare feet. She crouched down to cover them, which made her seem more feminine and approachable.

"My name is Brown," she said solemnly. I saw that her right hand still clutched the meat knife, but I could not resent this.

"Mrs. Brown," I murmured politely. So many people's names seemed to be Brown that night.

"I am a widow," she continued, in a sketchy, biographical style, with pauses for comments.

"Very sad, I'm sure," I faltered. Her conversation began to sound rather in the matrimonial way, but I remembered my bandages in time to take no real alarm.

"My husband is dead," she continued.

"So I gathered," I broke in hastily. "Can we have some wine or spirits of some kind for this young lady?" and I turned to Miss Brandon.

At this Mrs. Brown came abruptly out of her reminiscent state and waxed curious. "Are you running off with that girl?" she burst forth, jerking her thumb towards Miss Brandon, who turned very red, but looked, I realized with unreasoning anger, more inclined to laugh than to cast down her eyes.

"She is my sister," I said, looking the woman shamelessly in the eye, while I saw with a thrill at my heart that Miss Brandon started and stared at me. Would it occur to her, then, that I felt she needed

protection before the judgment of strangers in thus fearlessly flinging herself on my honour? The nobler side of me shrank from seeing her pretty head droop, and then turn away, while an irritable longing to feel myself regarded other than as a harmless watch-dog would jostle itself rudely to the front.

"Humph!" snorted the woman—snorted is the word—and then she eyed us fixedly. "I can't say that you look much alike."

"And yet I am a very handsome man without my bandages," I said, bowing with ball-room gallantry to Miss Brandon. Then remembering how grotesque I must appear, all disguised as I was, with my woollen cap and swollen face, I straightened myself up stiffly, and cried out with sudden irritation for the wine.

Although partially reassured, I think Mrs. Brown never wholly abandoned the idea that I was mad. I sat sullenly by until the drink was prepared, one of the women present watching me furtively,

while the other and fairer one turned to me as to a handy man, some one who could fetch and carry, could be humbly useful at the wedding of a happier man, but never at all conspicuous, except at his own funeral.

But hark! What was that? Was it only the wind which kept rustling to the door and away again? The window was rattling fiercely, or had I dozed? "There are men about," I shouted, and was upon my feet to find Miss Brandon with her cheeks glowing from the wine and her eyes brimming with laughter, while Mrs. Brown, rigid with terror, was stiffly swallowing the bread and butter she had just spread for her guest.

"Poor man!" cried Miss Brandon soothingly. "You went right to sleep. It was too funny, but I wonder you didn't jerk your poor head off. It was down so far and you brought it back so hard."

"Crazy as a loon," I heard Mrs. Brown mutter grimly, as she crept from behind the table where she had sprung. "Drat

him, and there I have eat all that bread! My stomach will be as sour as vinegar."

"I want a horse," I said coldly, "and something to ride in." I longed to deny that I had been asleep, but dared not. Better asleep than insane, and I was near both.

A faint gleam of hope lit the gaunt features of Mrs. Brown. There was, then, some prospect of being rid of us. "I suppose he might use Cousin John's horse," she said, talking across to Miss Brandon, as one might discuss the beef tea of a patient who is not to be reasoned with personally.

"Cousin John or Cousin Jim, it's all the same to me," I cried recklessly, "so long as he can go."

"I'm sure I can't say," she retorted, eyeing me askance as she unhooked a smoky lantern from its peg. "I only know Cousin John fools away his time in the summer peddlin' with him, then leaves him here to eat his head off in the winter. If I could only beef him he wouldn't live

a minute, I can tell you that!" and opening the door, she led me forth into what seemed a wilderness of snow-filled kegs and boxes, all of which I am quite certain that I stepped into. I arrived at the small stable in no mood to endure the undignified commotion set up by a roost of old hens and a solitary cock as we threw the light from our lantern in upon them. It was maddening, out upon a secret mission as we were, to note the zeal with which the cock set about his crowing, and to have the hens come squawking down as ready for the day's engagement as though the morning sun had tumbled bodily in upon them. Even Mrs. Brown found it trying, and cried tartly for the rooster to "shet his head," as we fought our way through to the horse's stall beyond.

Accurately speaking, we found no horse, but lying prone on some musty hay we discovered a four-legged grey thing which, beyond snorting a trifle as Mrs. Brown thrust the lantern contemptuously under his nose, took no further notice of us.

"There he is," she said bitingly. "Nothin' but a rat-hole to pour good oats into. He hasn't had a bit between his teeth for two months, but you may take him and welcome."

After digging in vain about his bony frame for some trace of life and spirit, I was in despair, but I had no choice. Together we pried him from his ill-smelling bed, and he developed, as he slowly unfolded his joints, into a regular carcass of a horse, with great hollows which it would have taken the earnings of a whole race of peddlers to round out with high-priced hay. "Are you sure he is strong?" I gasped. "Will he be up to a trip, you know? It seems to me he looks awfully shaky."

She wouldn't answer me, but kept on dragging out mouldy pieces of harness and moth-eaten robes, until I had an outfit the match for any rag-picker's trap.

"Heavens!" I moaned, as I mounted the sleigh, jerking at the rotten straps which were all the hold I had on that

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great brute. "He has our lives in his hands. He couldn't feel the strain of these lines if I were to drag them across his naked eye. Have you no respectable-looking ropes?" I called fretfully, resolving to drop to even that for the sake of security. But Mrs. Brown was at the bottom of an old feed-box, and rose to the surface with such a disgraceful contrivance in the shape of a whip that I felt it would be madness to appeal to any sense of decency within her.

Cautiously I steered my beast up to the door and left him in charge of Mrs. Brown, while I went inside for Miss Brandon. As I entered the house a clock struck two clattering strokes. "And to think," I exclaimed absently, "that I dined with Flo last night at six!"

The statement bore in upon me no impression of the truth after I had made it, but it startled Miss Brandon to hear me talking to myself, so I told her I had asked if she was feeling any stronger. It seemed human to retain her confidence in my san-

ity, my own faith in it was so badly shaken.

"And now you're off," cried Mrs. Brown joyfully a few minutes later, as I cracked the whip over the back of Cousin John's nag.

And as a matter of fact we were off even as she said it—the horse off the road, straddling about with its foot through an ash-barrel, and I off the seat with my toboggan cap off my head and filled to the brim with snow.

Both women screamed, of course. I picked myself up, seized the horse by the bit, forced him to kick himself loose from the barrel, and then we really were off, with but one more brief delay while I pressed into the half-frozen fingers of Mrs. Brown a third bill sufficiently large to cover the loss of our outfit should it never return to her.

Mrs. Brown had assured us that for several miles the road could be travelled blindfolded. "You see, you got clean off the trail tumblin' down that cañon," she had

explained irritably, "an' have got to feel your way back to the main travelled path. But just go slow, an' give the critter the lines, an' you can't run into nothin' else." And as it was perfectly black overhead, and not much better under foot, and the lines must inevitably burst under the slightest pressure, there seemed nothing for it but to put our united fates into the keeping of the animal's instincts.

Cowering and shrinking, I silently whipped my chilled fingers and stamped on my hardening toes, knowing all the time that I ought to be one of the most wretched creatures living, yet conscious of a sneaking delight in my false position, a rascally pleasure when the soft fur sleeve next me brushed my icy hand, which had nothing to do with my physical comfort in touching something warm. I think that I would have been content to drive on that way all night, not speaking at all, but sitting there, half frozen and wholly irrational, dreaming foolish dreams. But suddenly down went the curtain with a crash

upon perfumed knight and smiling lady, and up it rose on me, the married man, the trusty doctor. "Oh!" my companion burst out suddenly, turning her face towards me, though in that light I could see nothing of it but a white blur, "I am sure no father could have been kinder to me than you have been to-night, and that, too, without knowing my story. Why don't you ask me about myself?"

Swallowing the "father" like quinine which has stuck in the throat, I suggested faintly that there had been no time, but no sooner did my voice break the silence than she stopped me with a nervous start. "I wonder why I don't like to talk with you so well in the dark," she said uneasily. "I haven't seen your poor face really, it's been done up so; but, somehow, when I can't see your bandages you seem so different. Your voice is so—I don't know what you'd call it, but it seems so changed."

"I'm getting a cold in my head," I said firmly. I could not bear the sudden trembling in her voice.

She should not fear me if I had to go down to the grave and live there in her memory as an old fellow with full-grown girls dependent on him. "Oh, is that it? How funny!" she exclaimed with a relieved laugh. "But now I am going to tell you all about myself," and she settled down for narrative with a delightful little flutter which brought her warm garments brushing against my chilled limbs like something living.

"Just as you think best," I murmured, though I felt morally certain that if she should confess that the whole escapade was planned in a fit of rage because the proper kind of stuff for an evening gown had been denied her, I should swear she was justified.

"You see," she began, with a little sigh, "it all came about through that horrid will of papa's."

"Oh!" I said vacantly.

"Yes," she went on with relish, "and don't you think wills are nearly always horrid? They're made, you know, mostly

when people are sick and not quite right in their heads, and then how is any one to be argued with after he is dead and gone? Oh, I'm all against wills," and she shook her head severely.

"They certainly do stir up a great deal of ill-feeling," I stammered, seeing that she expected me to say something.

"And papa was so awfully good and all that, that he couldn't be got to see that others weren't all like him," she went on hurriedly. "So when his heart got to acting so queer, he just made his will, leaving me and my property all in uncle's hands, for mamma had been dead ever so long, and then he died that night, and it's all gone wrong ever since, and I presume I've had about as dry a time of it as almost anybody you can think of."

"Dry!" I exclaimed; it was really the first word that had caught my attention. I gave the will less than no thought at all. What had a ranch or two more or less to do with such eyes as hers?

"Yes, dry," she repeated firmly, "for

you see there was another funny thing about this will that I haven't mentioned yet, and that's the reason I came to be brought up in a convent."

"In a convent," I repeated feebly.

"Yes, in a convent," she said tragically, taking my horror for granted. "Perfectly horrid, wasn't it? But, of course, as I was to marry whom I pleased, that was about the only safe place for them to put me. I wouldn't be likely to want to marry a priest, now would I?"

"I should rather think not!" I exclaimed with unnecessary energy, completely roused. "What do you mean by marrying any one you pleased? I don't in the least understand you."

"I think, myself, that that is the funny part of it," she cried amiably, evidently pleased with my growing interest; "and I don't wonder you are surprised; but you see, papa had had such a dreadful time of it getting mamma—something or other was the matter with some land that belonged to their grandfathers—that it had given

him a hobby about people being crossed in love, and that's how it came about that he put such a queer thing in his will.

"I was to marry whom I pleased, and if I did marry, I was to have my property and use it as I pleased; but if I didn't marry, Uncle Hobart was to take care of me and all my money until I was twenty-one, and that's going to be next week."

"Next week! So soon?" I cried in surprise, for the wonder of her flight, when escape was so near, almost formed itself into words upon my lips.

"Soon—so soon!" she cried, and now with real anger in her voice, though not, I felt, against me. "It may seem soon to you, but it will be just six days too late, and then all my years of horrid old dresses in the convent, no parties, nor jewels, nor anything nice, will be for nothing; for I must either marry Cousin Harold at the end of this week, or Uncle Hobart will sell my mines before I can come of age, and then deny I ever had any, or will claim that they are the ones that turned out

badly, though they weren't mine at all, but his. Yes," she cried, defiantly facing me, "I don't deny that I have listened at key-holes, and pried into letters, and done lots of dreadful things to find all this out; but I've had my disposition just ruined by being kept mewed up all these years. How I used to rage when I could feel myself getting more and more poky, and then to have only a few dollars doled out to me at a time, when I knew that Cousin Harold, whom I just hate, was spending all my money, and putting off marrying me until the last moment, because I had been shut up in a convent until I was a perfect dowdy," and here she broke down in angry tears, while I sat a statue of fear and longing—longing to comfort and protect her as no staid, middle-aged doctor would be supposed to comfort a young and helpless woman, and fear lest the stern self-control I had been able so far to exercise should break down utterly under the strain of that low sobbing.

"My dear Miss Brandon," I said, low

and hurriedly, "calm yourself, I beg. Are you quite, quite certain about that will? Certain that you were left free to marry whom you choose?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, I should think I am," she burst out indignantly. "Why, it was for that reason and no other that I was kept mewed up in that stuffy old convent all those years, and never a man to look at but priests and some old things that did work about the grounds!"

It is pitiful to confess that I winced at this. It did not please me that she should ever have wished to meet other men, and when you recall that she had never really seen me and had only looked upon me as a married person with a swollen eye, you will wonder at my folly. "What right had you to want to see men?" I wanted to ask her hotly, but instead I cried softly: "Hark! I hear horses' feet behind. They are coming fast. Do you hear them?"

This dried her stormy tears at once, and breathlessly we sat and listened. Yes, I was right. From far up the steep road

there came to us swift, hard strokes, breaking startlingly upon the silence and filling us with chill premonition of pursuit and capture when our victory seemed all but accomplished. "They are following us," my companion whispered fearfully, creeping nearer to my side and resting there tremblingly. "They will not let me go. I know it. To-morrow my uncle was to meet some men and finish the sale of my mines which have turned out to be full of something. They will kill us if they find us here. Oh, what shall we do?"

What should we do, indeed? At that moment, as if to increase our perplexities, the moon, which had been hiding all night beneath a blanket of clouds, burst suddenly forth, clothed in glistening garments, which lighted every nook and cranny of the rugged scenery about us. Far above towered the snowy peaks, while away down below, a dim radiance, nestling close like a circlet of gems against the earth's dark line, the lights of the city lay. Above and below us stretched a tor-

tuous path upon which impatient hoofs were beating not many rods behind; and we—what could we do, all unarmed as we were, and at the mercy of an ancient beast whose every motion seemed wrung from him in bitter pain?

"Oh, you do not know my uncle! We are lost!" came in an awed whisper close beside me, and then a great desperation fell upon me. The road to the city stretched before us. Inside that city there was justice to be had; help, at least. Then reach that city we must before those fleet hoofs behind had tracked us down. With a spring I reached my feet, and folding the useless lash about the whip-stalk I held, I brought it down upon the back of the horse before me with all the energy of a despairing man's last effort. "Go!" I cried in a voice of thunder, then sank back crushed with the certainty of defeat, while nearer and yet nearer came those ringing footfalls, and a distant shout told us that our black shape on the moonlit track was already clear to our pursuers.

But what was this? What magic had that whip-stalk held? What fire had my hoarse cry infused into the huge frame before me? Or was it those clattering hoofs behind? Was the instinct of some ancient courser trembling through those starting veins, and pricking up with long-buried fire the dull ears drooping beneath their rusty harness? Scarce had that cry behind ceased echoing when the huge bulk of horseflesh before us began to tremble with the workings of some hidden passion. Slowly did the great head uplift itself, the great chest expand, and then, with a bound which, but for my too ready arm, must have flung my companion from the seat, the beast sprang forward, swinging us and the rickety old sleigh behind him with as much unconcern as though we were so many wisps of straw.

"Now may Heaven help us, I can do no more!" I gasped, guarding the useless lines with care for that awful moment which I felt must come, when the variation of a hair's breadth might save us from

some horrid death. Death! Why, the thing seemed simple. The only question was how to die. Every avenue was open, but since my remains might be recovered by my sorrowing friends, I yearned for a more symmetrical end than to go crashing down over jagged rocks into some bottomless abyss.

And now another shout from behind reached us. Faster and faster came the pursuing feet, while the great hulk before us worked its starting joints as though lightning itself were playing fast and loose inside them. Great clods of snow dug up by clattering shoes rained thickly about us, and struck upon our smarting cheeks. "The shoes themselves will be coming next," I groaned, crouching low, as my teeth grated upon the sand left from a mouthful of the snow and ice.

Would he, could he make it? Nearer, nearer yet those feet seemed coming. Would bullets be whistling next in the frosty hail about us? "Cling to my arm!" I cried in my companion's ear,

and then I half-rose to my feet and looked behind, only to be brought down upon a pair of bruised knees as our racing steed took a small boulder at a single leap.

"One more such trick and we are lost," I muttered between my teeth, and then we struck a smoother track, and I climbed upon the seat again, to meet, as I did so, a glance from Miss Brandon's dark eyes, shining and dilating in the moonlight until I lost all reason and strange visions seized upon me.

"Miss Brandon," I whispered, and my voice sounded far off to my own hearing, "if you were married, if you had a husband to protect you, you need not fear those men behind?"

She sighed impatiently. "Of course not," she said hurriedly. "But there's no use talking about it now, for they'll catch us; oh, they will surely catch us!" and she clung to me as a louder shout reached us.

"Listen to me," I whispered, taking her cold hands in mine boldly now, for

that I meant her well God be my witness. "A week from now you will be free, you will need no one's aid, but to-night, but now, let me protect you. For a few short hours be my wife in the sight of the law, and I swear you shall be to me a young and reverenced sister," and involuntarily I bared my head before her.

Ah, if I could have spoken in my own name and language then; but what a figure I must have cut. She might have laughed aloud as I crouched before her, disguised and disfigured as I was, but she only shrank from me. "Marry you!" she gasped. "Are you not married already, then? Oh, I was sure that you were married. What must you think of me, what must you!"

"I—I have been married," I stammered, pitying her so in her shame and loneliness that I made nothing of my continued perfidy. "But my wife is dead. You have no need to fear me. Remember how young you seem to me. Look up, and see that you can trust me."

As I pleaded with her the sleigh plunged on at the heels of that dreadful animal. Down and down the frightful grade we went, but he made nothing of it. Half the time we seemed perched upon his very haunches. Slowly the girl lifted her bowed head, and timidly she looked at me—at what she could see of me—and how I blessed then those hated bandages. Had she seen that I was young, that every pulse was tingling with a devotion beyond the power of reasoning age to feel, who can tell what might have followed. But, as it was, something in the swollen eye she studied seemed to bring comfort to her heart. She smiled, and although at that moment we took a stone the size of a dinner-table under our left runner, I never even felt the dull shock.

"It would be awfully funny," she faltered. "I hate to lose all my money before I've ever had a diamond necklace, or been abroad, and—and—afterwards——"

"And afterwards," I cried with my head whirling rapidly, though my voice

sounded paternal and reassuring still—"afterwards the law which has helped me to preserve for you your property shall give you back your liberty, and may Heaven bless you for your sweet trust in me."

And now go, old horse, go! Go, go, and may you yet, with "Cousin John" upon your back, canter into the very heart of Paradise. Half-standing, half-sitting, cautiously did I ply the whip. With line and voice I sought to guide his headlong charge; every nerve on fire, every pulse throbbing, wild with anxiety, lest one false step waken me from my dream of bliss.

And now lights from countless gambling dens, lights from sick-rooms, and the lights from distant streets came plainly to us. Go, go! And go he did, with great lunges of his awkward legs, and now and then a threatening snort which told of straining lungs gasping forth a vigorous protest or reproach. Half a mile, only a quarter now, and still those galloping feet behind.

Oh, for a dark alley into which we might plunge! See, there it yawns before us.

Now, one burst of speed, and we go crashing through a heap of rubbish, and breathless and panting, the knees of the horse bending beneath him, we spring out into a dark and loathsome alley, and with a "God bless thee, old nag!" and a pat on his reeking flanks, I flung a coin into the face of a man who started up from a doorstep, and cried: "Oats for that horse and a drink for yourself!"

And then what a chase began! A chase joined in by every homeless dog and vagrant cat we started from their unclean lairs, while drunken revellers hailed us with coarse jests as we flashed across their paths, and twice I fancied that the gleaming muzzle of a firearm threatened us from a dark retreat. But so rapid was our flight as I half-led, half-carried my trembling companion through the horrid tangle, we must have seemed to all we met as illusive as the shifting night shades, now and again trembling for a second between them and the moon's pale light. At last the air about us began to freshen, and with

a great gasp of relief and exultation I drew my companion into a decent thoroughfare, and, with anxious glances, sought for some sign which would lead me to what I most needed.

There is no time to be lost, not one second. I must ask directions, but of whom? Yonder, with stately step, comes a starred and coated officer of the law, and I shrink back and let him pass as though the weight of crime was pressing down upon my soul. Despair seizes on me; but hark, there are other feet! And see, there comes a belated traveller of respectable mien, a family man, long overdue at the domestic hearth, I would take my oath. I could read the signs of a mild debauch and guilty dread in his feverish haste and in the craven fear which lit his eye. "Sir!" I exclaimed, forgetting caution and springing so suddenly before him that he threw up his hand as though sandbagging were his nightly cross. "I beg your pardon," I said humbly, seeing how it was with him, and then I asked for what I wanted, and

poured out into his reluctant ear such a tale of love and romance that, had he contained a divine fire, he must inevitably have burst into flame on the spot. As it was, however, he stood and eyed me with a cold, dull eye, an eye filmy from loss of sleep, a suspicious eye, that did not twinkle at my amorous tale, and when I had finished, said merely: "You have been fighting, I see," and looked at my bandages with a self-righteous air which sat ill on so belated a reveller.

"And how could it be otherwise?" I asked plaintively. "I could not get her peaceably." For I had mixed up a romantic elopement with certain elements of highway robbery until I thought the tale sufficiently highly spiced. "But I beg of you, do not detain me. Surely you can direct me to the proper officer without suffering any strain upon your principles."

Coldly again did his dull eye scan me, up and down and all about, to rest at last upon the diamond scarf-pin I wore. "I am a jeweller," he remarked at last indif-

ferently, but his eye spoke for him with an eloquence I did not attempt to misunderstand.

"Indeed," I exclaimed joyously, "if that be the case, perhaps you can estimate for me the value of this bauble," and I plucked off the gem, forcing it upon him with an arch and meaning glance, while I secretly yearned to boot him for a cutthroat. But no sooner had the thing been done than I found the price beggarly compared with the comfort it brought to my jaded energies. I was no longer a rudderless ship drifting about at the mercy of every capricious wave. I was an important event, something with a purpose, a man who paid his way.

I would give a connected account of the next hour's work were the thing possible, but so confused are the real events in my mind with certain vague imaginings that I dare not vouch for what might be called the plain facts. We walked, I should say, a great number of miles, though they have been reduced by some to barely as many

blocks, and stopped at several houses where people, men mostly, in night-caps, I think, though I will not insist on the night-caps, came and peered at us through cracks in doors, and swore at us first, and then talked more mildly, and at most of the houses I kept telling my name until they stopped me, and had me sign it to papers, which I did with pens as large as walking sticks.

I know for a certainty that I kept paying out money, but probably not in the quantities it seemed, for my bankers tell me I had drawn no thousand-dollar bank-notes, nor bags of silver dollars, and then walked again, and more men in night-caps came and looked at us, and I told my story to some, and to some I didn't, until suddenly I came to myself in a dusty little parlour before a man in a dress-coat and felt boots, who was saying to me as well as he could with a bad cold in his head, "I pronounce you man and wife." I was standing holding fast to Miss Brandon's hand, and the knowledge that she was no longer

Miss Brandon was tingling through my senses. My wife—for she was my wife in the eyes of the men who stood staring wonderingly at me—gave a frightened little cry, tottered for an instant, and then fell fainting into arms, so white, so wan, so childlike that I thought we had killed her somehow with our clumsy doings. Snatching her up, I dashed out into the hall with her, where my sudden entrance scared up a covey of half-dressed women, who made a rush for the stairs, but finding they couldn't make it, turned and defiantly faced me.

"Show me a room!" I shouted, and they fled before me like rats, until, following their scant skirts, I found myself standing before a clean, but tumbled bed, from which the scared occupant had just sprung to secrete herself behind a half-open closet door. Here I tenderly placed my charge, and, with one more look at her wan face, I fled from the apartment, shutting the door upon her and the women, and then I crouched close beside it, wild

with fear lest a cry of horror reach me at any moment to tell me that life had fled.

Nor from that lowly post could I be uprooted, though the hole was dark and the women, running in and out, stumbled against me as they ran, spilling things over themselves and me. At last one of the lot came and stood before me, with arms akimbo, her face shining with good-natured scorn. "Six months from now you'll take things more easy," she said.

"And the lady, how is she?" I cried.

"The lady?" she repeated wonderingly; "your wife, you mean," and then, for I reddened furiously beneath my bandages, she laughed and cried: "Why, the man is blushing. You better go and shave yourself," she cried jocosely, "you are no fit sight for so pretty a little runaway. Leave her to me, and brush up, or she'll be more than ready to run back with papa when he gets here."

There was good sense in this, and I crept down-stairs, and meeting in the hall my gentleman of the diamond pin, asked him

shamefacedly where I might obtain at once a bath, a change of clothing, and a shave.

Again was I led forth, and once more we were knocking at people's doors, and once more did surly men peer at us through stingy little chinks, and, by and by, a half-dressed barber stood before us, mixing up cold lather, and stropping a razor with a sleepy blindness far from reassuring.

"You'll have to get off them rags," he said, with unnecessary rudeness, pointing to my bandages, and then he stripped them from me with no gentle hand, and fell at his work.

"Be careful of that jaw," I said heavily, and then I think that I must have gone to sleep, for, though I remember his asking me snappishly, "Which jaw?" I remember nothing else until a sudden application of bay rum to a cheek all but freed of skin brought me to myself with a moan of pain.

"Whatever have you had them rags on for?" was the greeting of my tormentor, as he hastily covered the evidence of his

brutality with a dab of powder, and then my eyes, straying about in sleepy wonder, fell upon my reflection in the long glass before me. What, indeed? Why, I was myself again! How long had I been masquerading unnecessarily in those bandages? Why, even my swollen eye, though a thought heavy about the upper lid, wore only a look of interesting melancholy.

I could have sung for joy. I sprang to my feet with such an expression of artless delight on my face that the man demanded four times the usual rate on the spot. "It's too much to be expected to climb out at this hour and sharpen up extra for what one would get at mid-day when the trade is driving," he said, in excuse of his robbery, but I took him so pleasantly that he quite bestirred himself when he got to my hair, and when I mentioned, with an attempt at gaiety, that I was without hat or coat, he offered to drum up a friend of his who kept a clothing store a little farther down the street.

"Let's be off," I cried like one leading

a charge of cavalry. Half an hour later I was so completely metamorphosed that the lady who had recommended the change did not know me when I rushed in upon her, until I broke forth into a storm of inquiries as to the state of the invalid I had left in her charge.

"Oh, is it you, then!" she cried, throwing her fat hands in the air, while her eyebrows sought out her oily hair once more. "Well, well! So that's why she ran away from home, was it! A good eye and a neat moustache will make a fool of any girl that breathes, I see, and her home is no better than the dirt she walks on."

"Where is she?" I cried, for I was burning to display myself before her without my former dismal trappings. Of course, I should have remembered how she had learned to regard me—that she was weak, tired, and in a situation of the utmost delicacy, and in a manner I did; but how, without raising fatal suspicions, could I refuse to enter when the attendant pointed to the parlour and said my "bride"

was in there? I might, however, have gone in more slowly; might have followed up my timid knock, which brought a smothered chuckle from behind me, with less speed; but as it was, I was inside the door, and on my knees beside the chair in which she sat, pouring out a stream of inquiries, regrets, and congratulations before I noticed that she was not listening to me, but had drawn herself back from me as from a wild beast, and was regarding me in a pallid horror which struck me to the heart.

"Why, don't you know me?" I cried, in pity and reproach, at which her face turned crimson, then went down upon the arm of her chair, and she burst into tears with such an abandonment of grief that I was beside myself.

"Oh, forgive me, forgive me!" I cried, though I was not conscious of having sinned against her. But she only shook her head, and bade me leave her, and, as I could not do that, I dropped into hopeless silence, regarding the crown of fluffy

hair, which was all I could see, in helpless misery, until gradually about an inch of her white forehead began to show itself above the handkerchief she was clutching, and a desperate voice said: "How could you be so young—so awfully young, and all that? It's just—just too dreadful for anything."

"I know it," I said meekly, though I did not think it dreadful at all. "But you know all this is just for a little while. I only stayed to make you understand that. I will leave you now, if you prefer it."

There was a silence, then she reached her hand cautiously towards me, still with her face concealed behind the handkerchief.

"I am not angry with you," she said timidly. "And if you had been old, you know, come to think about it, you couldn't have got about so. Perhaps it's best this way, after all."

"Perhaps it is," I murmured gravely, barely touching the dainty fingers, then laying them discreetly down again, while

my traitor heart leaped high and mad fancies possessed my brain. And then, to reassure her, for I cared little enough about it myself, I began to talk to her of her business complications, artfully rousing in her the resentment against her uncle of which I had caught a glimpse; and so, little by little, winning her to look at me and trust me as I sat down back from her, not trusting myself in the least, and very much fearing that some hasty word or action might drop again the veil which seemed lifting from between her soul and mine.

"Oh, how can I ever thank you enough?" she cried at length. "And to think that you are about the first honest man I ever talked to, though, I suppose," she added hastily, "that the priests must be all right, being in the church and all that, but then you know they have to be so queer, that it doesn't seem to matter whether they are or not; one doesn't care much, you know."

Well, they would not let us alone, so we had some breakfast—the usual thing, I

suppose, for I remember being asked whether I would take cream in my coffee, and declining it, then wondering why the stuff tasted wrong and wasn't the right colour; and something about being asked if the steak suited me, and that I answered dreamily that it did not, at which people looked offended. Little could be expected of one sitting down in family fashion with a blushing girl, who kept her eyes fastened questioningly upon him whenever she thought herself unobserved, and who faltered out little womanly proffers of delicacies that led him to pile his untouched plate with incongruous eatables.

A carriage was got for us by some one, and I paid out more money, almost my last. Then we were directed to a down-town law office; arrived indecently early, and were received by a janitor much out of temper from an encounter with the furnace, and I was snubbed by him and frowned upon; and when the lawyer came I left my companion in the reception-room, and went into the inner office with him,

wishing devoutly that I might have sought my brother-in-law's advice as to the kind of help to employ in my delicate business, yet not daring to venture near him, as I valued my liberty.

Too utterly jaded to use my ordinary tact, I did not decently prepare the poor man. While I pelted him with my wild statements, he sat far forward upon the edge of his office chair, with one eye upon the window beside him, making ready, I felt, for that moment when my lunacy should break loose and he must leap for his life. But, though clumsy to the verge of brutality, I was firm with him, and nothing he could say shook my confidence in my reason, or the reality of what had happened. So gradually he left off his feverish attention to the window and began to really heed me. But when I reached that strange morning wedding, he sprang to his feet and snatched the papers pertaining to the ceremony from me, much as one would seize a loaded revolver from the hands of a child.

Our names he took down, and then my companion must be brought in and questioned, and when he had cross-examined her until the toe of my boot fairly tingled, he bundled us both out of the office, telling us when to call again, all the time muttering to himself as though his nervous system had sustained a severe shock.

Once more in the carriage, what was I to do? We could not ride all day. Should I take my companion straightway and place her in my sister's care? Not for all the world, until the mystery surrounding her could be cleared up.

What, then? Timidly I turned and looked at her, but nothing was to be got from that, save the disconcerting perception that she, too, felt the awkwardness of our situation, was crushed beneath it, and cowered away from me, her head turned aside and her whole attitude one of complete prostration.

"Well," said I briskly, as my eyes noted this, "we will drive to a hotel, where you may rest," and, pretending I had forgot-

ten something, I ran and conferred with the driver as to some quiet retreat, the name of which he gave with a leer, so that I climbed back beside my companion, filled with vengeful longings, which were augmented when I detected my bride in the act of studying me from beneath her lashes, and saw that, far from comforting her, the survey of my person seemed to fill her mind with renewed consternation.

"Miss Brandon," I cried softly, a whole world of respect and compassion ringing in my voice, and then I remembered that she was no longer Miss Brandon, and she remembered it too, and the good work was all undone. Up rushed the scarlet to my face, and to hers too, poor girl, and with a childish motion she pressed one hand across her face to conceal it from me.

"It's going to be a chilly day," I gasped with an attempt at unconsciousness she could not second, and so we sat in a silence awful to her I knew, while my heart thumped away at my side like a hammer.

No sooner had the carriage stopped than

she was upon her feet with down-bent head, and I had scarcely time to get the door open and be ready to receive her before she slipped down, avoiding my extended arms, and stood beside me like a bird ready for flight.

"Good-bye," she murmured feverishly, "you don't need to come in with me. I can take care of myself now," with a little catch in her voice. She would have been gone, but forgetting where I was, I caught her hand and made her raise her eyes to mine. "Oh, forgive me," she faltered, "you have been so kind, but——"

"But I shall not obey you now," I finished for her firmly, and then I dropped her hand, for I saw that the driver was fairly feasting his vulgar curiosity on our little scene. I saw something else, too, with a sudden sickening chill at my heart. An elegant private carriage containing two ladies was being drawn up with a flourish beside us. In one of those ladies I recognized my sister, while in the other I discovered, with a sense of being caught up

in the grasp of a whirling maelstrom, the most yielding of the fair creatures to whom I had been paying idle court since my arrival at my sister's home. They had seen me, but not my companion; for, as I had said before, I am large, and I was standing before her. They had seen me, and were hot after me, and my friend was smiling upon me with gay indulgence.

The coachman from his elevated seat had also seen me, and seen not only me, but my companion, and I thought there was pity in his glance as he reined in his horses close beside us—so close that before my mind could act both ladies saw I was not alone, but saw it too late to draw back. The half-reproached, half-relieved greeting already framed upon my sister's lips froze into a little frosty nod, while a delicate flush of shame and outraged confidence spread itself over her handsome features. Her friend sat like flesh and blood turned of a sudden into an excellent quality of granite, while not the faintest trace of pity gleamed from the four eyes turned

haughtily upon the shrinking figure beside me.

I had stood so much that I think I had little reason left; besides, although I knew the circumstances were against me, I was a little indignant, which still further blinded me. So without a thought of their amazement, indeed with scarcely a consciousness of the thunderbolt I was levelling at their heads, I took my companion's hand and led her a little forward, remarking in a perfectly vacant manner: "Oh, how do you do, Flo? Let me make you acquainted with my wife. And Miss Thompson, also, I should like to have you meet my wife. Pleasant morning, isn't it?" And then, utterly apathetic from despair, I stood and stared listlessly.

I have always admired women, but the conduct of the outraged Miss Thompson at that moment moved me to such intemperate wonder that, with the insane tendency one has to grasp at trifles in moments of peril, I thought for a moment of nothing else save the sudden glittering

composure which fell down over and stayed about her as the fatal words slipped past my babbling lips. Not the shriek of my sister in that public place, nor the violent start and reproachful cry of my wife, had power for that moment to rouse me.

"Well, really now, quite abrupt and theatrical, I do declare!" cried Miss Thompson, while every other mortal on the spot was tongue-tied with horror. "And to think, Flo, that you lost a night's sleep worrying over such a refreshingly romantic creature! I would tear my hair just a little, my dear, if I were you. Of course, I should recommend the greatest discretion while you're about it."

When one looked from the pitiful, frightened face of the child beside me to the chill, white face of Flo, glaring down at us from the carriage door, this rattling talk sounded like profanity, and yet I did not blame Miss Thompson. At heart I was guiltless, yet I cowered beneath the glitter of her eye as though confronted with actual bigamy. I have said before

that Flo is a good woman. She is. She is more. She is a great woman, and at that trying moment she proved as much. After all was said and done, I was her brother, and my honour was her honour.

"I am very glad to meet your wife, I am sure," she at length gasped out, with a smile which must have come much harder than the last defiance of many a well-baked martyr. "Do get in and come with us, both of you. I was on the way to the morgue to identify you, but we will drive home now."

It sounded suspiciously friendly, but I was looking for floating straws, and I turned to assist my trembling charge in beside the others.

"Forgive me," I whispered, as I half-lifted her upon the cushions; but she would not raise her eyes to mine. When I murmured in my sister's ear, "Flo, be kind, I will explain," she turned her face away with a low order to the driver which set the carriage spinning towards home at a rate that threatened to cripple every slow-

footed pedestrian along our track. But if my bride would not look at me, nor my sister talk, Miss Thompson did both and to spare. Heavens, how she scourged me with her merry speeches! "And to think, Flo, you naughty girl," she cried, turning a vengeful glare on my poor sister, who writhed beneath her just attack, "that you passed him off upon us as a gay bachelor. What if I had lost my heart?" And she glared at me, while I wondered to think she dared claim to own such an organ.

I don't suppose we were more than ten minutes making that drive, yet I seemed to grow old and grey before it ended. Helpless to retaliate on Miss Thompson, my manhood seemed to desert me, and I sat huddled up upon the seat like some poor relation out for an airing.

At last we were at home once more. Some one—only the coachman, I think—drove off with Miss Thompson, and after more confusion I was standing before my brother-in-law, who had been telephoned for in great haste; with Flo showing symp-

toms of hysterics on a sofa at hand, and my poor bride doubtless weeping her pretty eyes out in a chamber above us, whither she had fled without one word or backward glance for me. Thus standing, suspected by all, pitied by none, I poured out my strange tale for perhaps the hundredth time.

I can see my brother-in-law now as he sat there, large, loose-limbed, and prosperous, filled with uneasy embarrassment at the irregularity of being in his own house during business hours, his eyes roaming in conjugal anxiety to where his wife lay, yet ever returning to me with a friendly light in their sharp, grey depths. Not a figure to encourage romantic yarns, and yet I poured mine out upon him, and saw him shift and wince, and heard his muttered "By George's" and his "Oh, come now, old fellow's" without flinching; and then, when I had finished, they both sat and gazed at me with pale faces and frightened eyes, much as they might have looked had I been brought home to them spread out on a shutter.

"Never mind, Flo," were the first words gasped out by poor William when I had ended. "George, my dear boy, I'll see you through this," and then steps came hurrying along the hall, and the door fell open to admit a servant's flustered face. But before it had fairly dawned upon us, it was shoved aside, and in bounded a small, stooped figure which I recognized as the lawyer I had consulted that morning. Something exciting he had to tell; his face showed that, and before I could speak to him, he and my brother-in-law ran at each other and fairly exploded with a lot of legal jargon in which I seemed to figure as both "John Doe" and "Richard Roe," so involved had my affairs become. Then all three of them—for my sister had mixed herself up in the confusion—turned and looked at me: my sister—for she loved me—with happy tears chasing the shadows from her eyes; my brother-in-law—for he loved my sister—with a face of profound relief; and my lawyer—for he loved his gold—with a

countenance uplifted by the vision of a heavy fee.

"Sir," he said, "sir, allow me to congratulate you; you have married an heiress!" and he grasped me with fingers purple from the arteries of his fountain pen, and shook me as though rattling sovereigns from a sack.

"By George, old fellow, you lit on your feet this time!" burst forth William with an explosive laugh, and he gave me a blow upon the back which would have driven home a railroad spike.

"Oh, George, and she's so pretty!" whispered my sister, with her arms about my neck. "Couldn't you—don't you think you might learn to like her just a little?"

The next two weeks of my existence were as troubled as a sick man's dream, for though scornfully indifferent to the wretched dollars involved in the affair, every one else seemed to consider them of the first importance, and I led a wretched life of it in the hands of my lawyer, who

worked me like a day labourer with his everlasting interviews. And when Miss Brandon's uncle and cousin (I hadn't the courage to even think of her by any other name) turned violent and insulting, no one would think of letting me meet them, one at a time, and have it out with them. Those who took an interest in the tiresome details told me that the fantastic will which had made all the trouble showed up practically the same as it had been given to me; and, finally, the matter was settled somehow on a comparatively peaceful basis. The uncle denied everything, of course, but finally disgorged enough, I suppose, to satisfy those who were handling the business. Anyway, they ceased tormenting me about it; even Dr. A——, whose case had of course complicated my troubles, recovered from his miraculously trifling injuries, and I had time to fall back on the real source of my sufferings.

It had its root in the unaccountable dislike taken to me by the young bride flung so strangely on my care. This it was

which robbed me of my appetite, destroyed my pleasing manners, made me peevish with my sister, intolerant of the cook, pettish to a degree with the housemaid, and downright savage with the smirking coachman, who privately considered himself a party to all my unwholesome notoriety. And how they bore with me! I wondered at their goodness even while I kept on trampling over them in my unbridled egotism.

It must have been patent to every woman in the house, from my sister down to the meanest scrubwoman, that I was the victim of an engrossing and despairing passion; and so my sister ignored petty flings, the cook did violence to her own past record, the housemaid filled my vases with flowers, and through all this womanly kindness I stalked untamed, dishevelled as to ties, solitary as to habit, a lean spectre of a bridegroom without a bride.

It was apparent to every one that my bride had no desire for my society, and I was made to feel, even by Flo, that it would

be considered a graceful act for me to take my meals down town whenever the pretty recluse had been prevailed upon to promise she would leave her room.

"You see she feels so queer, you know," my sister would say with an inscrutable smile. "And I have promised that we will be alone to-night"; and so I would rush off savagely, take a few wretched morsels of food somewhere, then sneak home again with the unacknowledged hope of surprising them at the table, only to behold vanishing skirts melting away behind some closing door. After that I would fling away to my room, and commence my daily task of packing the satchel which I invariably unpacked before the night was over.

I fell to absenting myself from the common haunts of man, taking long and dismal walks in the suburbs of the place, moody and suicidal. During one of these rambles it was, at a moment when my self-pity was at the keenest, that I came upon a group of men, one of whom was in police-

man's garb. He was directing the others with voice and gesture regarding a maimed and halting beast that hobbled in their rear. "Take him to the outskirts and shoot him!" he bawled. "He broke a plate-glass window to-day racing with a street car," and, with this death sentence warm upon his lips, he faced about to run full against me, as I darted towards him.

"Stop them! Stop those men!" I called, and then, before his fingers could come groping for my collar, I explained more calmly: "I know the owner of that horse. He will gladly pay for any damages that it has done, and agree to see after it more carefully in the future."

I think he thought I was demented, but the colour of my gold was the same as that of any sane man's; so, after a decent pause in behalf of his official dignity, he recalled his vassals, and a moment later, with the whole crowd jeering at me, I had started on my homeward way, leading the wretched outcast. On through the sloppy road we went, we two who had made that dark

night race together—he worn and spent in body, and I with my spirit biting the very dust. Long was the way, but at length we turned in at the door of a public stable, where a wondering but friendly hostler took the halter from me, while I told him my desires.

"If you don't 'low to use him none, he can be pulled through all right, I guess," he said doubtfully. "But his legs is stiff as posts, and he won't never be good for nothin' much but slow travel"; and then, while he went for oats and a blanket, I stooped and I looked into the creature's almost human eyes in dumb apology for the wrong my passion had done him. "And it was all in vain, old nag," I whispered, patting his hair with a lingering touch, for his shape was a beautiful memory to me; and again, in fancy, I could see it steaming along the frozen road which stretched so long, so long before me, while a girl nestled at my side, and a peril that made her mine to save came rushing on behind.

Distracted with memories, I hurried home in no mood to cope with Flo, when she came and gently probed and goaded me, until the secret of my heart came out in an angry confession that I loved the wife who would not even raise her eyes to mine. She gave me not a ray of hope. She even said, "Poor boy!" And sullen with despair, I flung myself from her presence.

I now decided conclusively to leave the country. I went down to dinner enveloped in a halo of resolves, having mentally declined every objection which the courtesy of a host or the affection of a relative could urge against my departure. I was a little late, but it did not matter. I opened the door carelessly, only to find myself stricken in such confusion as I had not felt since my first ball.

It was not the teasing light from Flo's smile which disconcerted me, nor yet the friendly encouragement which radiated from William's entire person. No; some one else was there, some one dressed in

shimmering white, with a blushing face, but a bright and happy one—a young person whom Flo and William called "Bernice" with a familiarity positively maddening, inasmuch as I dared call her nothing at all.

That dinner! How I got through it without stabbing myself with the implements of which I seemed to have forgotten the use, or scalding myself with the soup which I swallowed boiling hot, no one can tell. I certainly was a great care to the servants; they were kept busy dragging off the small articles I wrecked about me; but no one noticed my accidents. They were all in the highest spirits, and laughed at my few stuttering remarks as though I were the funniest creature living.

"But I am sorry you feel that you must leave us," said Flo, when we had got back to the drawing-room, catching her train from beneath my feet as she spoke, and smiling upon me. "Thomas says you have packed up again. I wonder that you don't wear out your clothing, changing it

about so." Then she melted from the room, and William, without even the decent pretext of an excuse, made haste to follow.

I think my companion knew that they were going, but when we were fairly alone her courage failed her. A little cry escaped her lips, and, had I not quickly placed myself before her, she, too, would have vanished.

"Bernice," I cried, and I was on my knees before her, "you must help me to save my honour. I said that I would leave, but I cannot. Oh, Bernice, my little bride, I cannot!"

Had I frightened, had I shocked her? I dared not look up, but clasping tightly in my own the trembling hands which I caught as they wound themselves nervously together, I pressed them close against my downbent face. There was a long silence while the small hands struggled feebly in mine; then they grew still, and there came faintly: "I—I don't think that I want you to go—but you never had any wife—

and—you aren't a doctor at all—and—and——"

If there are those who would prefer to believe that I remained upon my knees through all that faltering speech they may do so, but I think there are many who will appreciate me better if they doubt that I was so passive.

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